In Search of Presence: Disappearance and Memory in Mexico

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This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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STATEMENT 1

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To Ana and Sam.

And to all of the disappeared.

Nos faltan a todxs.

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Thesis Summary

This thesis explores memory and memorialisation in response to contemporary disappearances in Mexico. Unlike previous cases of enforced disappearance under military dictatorship, in Mexico disappearance is taking place in an electoral democracy under, but not explained by, the context of the war on drugs. Using ethnographic, participatory, and collaborative methods, I explore memorials and sites of memory, arts-based projects responding to disappearance, and the actions of relatives searching for the disappeared and pursuing justice, to discuss what is revealed in the wake of disappearance. Rather than a focus on typical sites that narrate memory, I prioritise lived experiences of memory in the everyday lives of people who are living with the presence of absence. This thesis argues that how people respond to and construct life around disappearance reveals the precarity of liberal modernity, the politics of time and space, and relationality between people and with their environments. The people in this thesis are engaging in a politics of memory, resisting narratives that enact a politics of time to place unresolved injustices in the past, and using their own conceptualisations of memory to build community. Furthermore, I demonstrate how the process of making is a meaningful site of memory and its construction. In the processes of memorialising, making, searching, connecting, and rebuilding that we see throughout the thesis, transformations take place. These are transformations of people, places, objects, communities and more, which are overlooked locations of memory and politics. In these ways this thesis disrupts dominant conceptualisations of memory and disappearance and argues for a broadening of the ways we think and do memory.

Note on translation: all translations from Spanish to English are the author's.

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All photographs are the author's, unless otherwise indicated.

Chapter 1: Introduction

> *Our point of departure was that this war does not deserve to be told only from the blood, from the brutality, from the nonsense of the uniformed and non-uniformed murderers. It deserves to be told from the dignity of the survivors, from the invisible seams of love that appear among the ruins, from the people healing souls, from those who made themselves heard when they took to the streets to shout their truth in public, from those who organised themselves with the concern to do something.*
>
> Marcela Turati and Daniela Rea (2012b, p9)

This thesis explores memory and memorialisation in response to contemporary disappearances in Mexico. This is not about disappearance as an event, although the details of the event are an important part of memory and the search, but about what happens after a disappearance, when people and society are living with absence. It is an attempt to listen and pay attention to the multiple responses that are unfolding in the wake of disappearance, an attempt to see and think about what it is that these shattering experiences are revealing to us about the world we construct and inhabit. What I initially saw in this project was an opportunity to try to understand processes of memory, narrative construction, and activism against disappearance in the moment, to listen to the debates and to follow these movements as they happened. When we speak of memorialisation, it is assumed that the referent act is in the past, and that with temporal and spatial distance there is a need for reflection. Yet disappearance in Mexico is taking place daily and practices and discourses of memory are nascent. I came to this project wondering what it means to be speaking of memory in this context, as disappearance continues on a daily basis. But I came to see that what disappearance in this moment reveals to us is more than a politics of memory, but ontological questions of absence and presence, the construction of time, and the precariousness of the modern social order.

I began this project in September 2014, when an opportunity arose to explore an idea that I had been building for some years. My undergraduate degree in Geography had taken me to Buenos Aires, Argentina, to research the Plaza de Mayo as a space of protest, and I was introduced to the well-known Mothers and Grandmothers of the

disappeared. Some years later I studied a Masters and returned to Buenos Aires, this time to research spaces of memory, specifically memorials to the disappeared of the dirty war. Then, while I was in Mexico in 2012 and 2013, I became aware of the contemporary crisis of disappearance unfolding there. As President Enrique Peña Nieto took office his administration released data on his predecessors, revealing that between the end of 2006 and 2012 over 26,000 people had disappeared (Amnesty International 2013; Human Rights Watch 2013). This data was contested; there was no distinction between disappearance, enforced disappearance, and missing persons, and it included a number of people who had since been found, some alive, others dead. Nonetheless, this was a crisis taking place in an electoral democracy on a scale comparable to the last military dictatorship in Argentina, where 30,000 people were disappeared (Robben 2005a). The cases of Argentina and Chile and the memorialisation efforts that have taken place there over the past forty years dominate academic work on memory and disappearance. In Mexico, however, there was an opportunity to try to understand what memory and absence means in the present tense of everyday life amidst violence and fear.

The same week I began my PhD on this relatively unreported issue, a case of disappearance took place in Mexico that dramatically shaped awareness of the problem both domestically and internationally. On the 26 September 2014, a group of students from the Escuela Normal Rural de Ayotzinapa, a teacher training college in Guerrero, southern Mexico, were travelling on buses they had commandeered towards the city of Iguala. The buses were intercepted and attacked by police, leaving six people dead, around forty injured, and forty-three students were taken away in police trucks. They were not arrested, they were not taken to a police station; they were disappeared (GIEI 2015; Mónaco Felipe 2015; Gibler 2016; GIEI 2016; Forensic Architecture 2018; Gallagher et al. 2018). The Procuraduría General de la República (PGR, Office of the Attorney General) attempted to control the narrative of this event, and tried to write it into the past. The state quickly formed an explanation for why the students were attacked and, on 7 November 2014, Attorney General Jesús Murillo Karam held a press conference to deliver the government's "historic truth" of the events of the 26 and 27 September (EAAF 2016; Moon 2016). With photos, testimonies, and video re-enactment, he described how members of the Guerreros Unidos cartel killed and destroyed the bodies of the students: some asphyxiated and

others shot, their bodies were cremated in an open fire at a rubbish dump, and their remains disposed of in plastic bags in a river. The PGR made arrests and declared the case closed.

Yet, alongside this state narrative others were forming. The families of the students, supported by experts and academics from a range of fields, rejected the government's "historic truth". They questioned the plausibility of the cremation, the lack of chemical and forensic evidence, major omissions in the investigation, and the dubious testimony on which this was all based, obtained through torture (GIEI 2015; EAAF 2016; GIEI 2016; OHCHR 2018a). In the days and weeks that followed the disappearance of the forty-three, searches for them began to reveal clandestine graves. Sixty were found in the area surrounding Iguala in the first few months, containing at least 129 bodies, none of who were the forty-three (BBC 2015). Who, then, were these people? Who were their families? When were they murdered? How long had they been missing? The ease with which dead bodies were found contrasted starkly with the search for the forty-three, which was impeded and covered up at every level (GIEI 2015; EAAF 2016; GIEI 2016).

The families of the students asked the independent Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense (EAAF, Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team) to make an assessment of the rubbish dump where the cremation supposedly took place. The team were not present when the human remains were supposedly found and removed, thus unable to verify the chain of custody, and when the EAAF reached the site it had been unsecured for several days (EAAF 2016). Their final report resolutely rejected the government's "historic truth" (EAAF 2016). Under pressure from the international community, the Mexican government agreed to an independent investigation of the case by the Inter-American Human Rights Commission in January 2015. The Grupo Interdisciplinario de Expertos Independientes (GIEI, Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts) had a one-year mandate to investigate the case and make recommendations for criminal proceedings and the search for the students. The group released damning six-month and twelve-month reports, which described countless human rights violations by the Mexican state in their investigation of the case, a lack of capacity to analyse evidence, obstructions to the investigation, a failure to

investigate superiors, a lack of adequate victim care, criminalisation of victims, and a general lack of cooperation with their investigations (GIEI 2015; GIEI 2016).

The spectre of the Ayotzinapa case has hung over Mexico and my research for these four years, as the events that unfolded took twists and turns that revealed the depths and functions of corruption, impunity, and enforced disappearance in contemporary Mexico. But it also galvanised awareness of disappearance in society; it brought people into the streets in protest and drew previously unseen attention to the problem. However, what motivated me to undertake this research was the scale of the crisis of disappearance and mass human rights violations that was taking place, and how obscured it was. Ayotzinapa has garnered widespread attention not least because there were multiple victims, it was clearly evidenced, and because it demonstrates the levels of collusion between local and international organised crime, the police, the armed forces, and politicians. But Ayotzinapa is the tip of an enormous iceberg. Behind these forty-three families searching for their sons, are now almost 37,000 others (SEGOB 2018), a rate of thirteen people per day during the Peña Nieto presidency (Proceso 2018). And these are just the cases that are reported. Human rights and relatives organisations in Mexico estimate that these recorded cases are just a fraction of the real figure, as low as ten percent of those missing (Open Society Foundations 2016, p.4). Ayotzinapa has shaped the terms of the contemporary debate on disappearance in Mexico, and in turn has shaped my project, but a focus on Ayotzinapa has the potential to write contemporary disappearance in Mexico as a single shocking case, and to overlook the structural violence that is created by the conditions of impunity and the so-called war on drugs.

This thesis, then, looks at responses to disappearances that go beyond Ayotzinapa. I focus mainly on disappearances since 2006, but do not sever these contemporary disappearances from their continuity with disappearances stretching back decades. I do not centre Ayotzinapa, but neither do I exclude it from the story of disappearance in Mexico. And, as the quote at the beginning of this introduction suggests, at the heart of this thesis is an exploration of how disappearance is experienced in the lives of those closely affected by it; how relatives of the disappeared and those who accompany them fight for space, for memory, and for presence, in a society that does not acknowledge their pain nor the existence of the problem. It was my conviction

that by listening well to stories of disappearance and lives in the wake of it, we might learn something that challenges the ways memory is dominantly framed. It is in this way that I hoped to learn about memory, disappearance, and absence themselves; what they are, what they do, how they are experienced. From a very different context, I find how Annemarie Mol approached her work on the disease atherosclerosis to be inspiring. Mol (2002, p.53, emphasis in original) describes,

> I present you with sketches of separate scenes....The important roles in these sketches are played by things as well as words, hands as well as eyes, technologies as well as organizational features. Together these heterogeneous ingredients allow me to tell about *atherosclerosis*. Not about the social causes and consequences of the disease, not about the way patients, doctors, and whoever else involved perceives it. But about *atherosclerosis* itself. What it is.

This thesis is made up of things as well as people, practices as well as spaces, which together tell something about disappearance and what it reveals about our social and political worlds.

This introductory chapter to the thesis now turns to a discussion of the theoretical frameworks, literatures, and questions that have motivated, challenged, and shaped it. This thesis was in many ways stimulated by frustrations with limited and limiting debates in memory studies and how experts in transitional and post-conflict contexts practice memory, placing it within the realm of reconciliation and reparation. I want to begin without these assumptions, to start instead with an open conceptualisation of memory and see where it can take us. The following discussion, therefore, is an attempt to untangle the web of debates, fields, and disciplines that come together when we speak of memory and disappearance, and provide an introduction to the questions of disappearance, memory, time, space, and liberal modernity, that this thesis responds to and sits within. This chapter, secondly, situates contemporary disappearance in Mexico historically, politically, and socially, and teases out what it is about this case that challenges our assumptions about disappearance and in turn memory. Finally, this introduction concludes with a chapter outline for the thesis ahead.

Memory and Disappearance

When searching for a place to ground my project, I turned to what can be described as memory studies, the loose academic field that crosses many disciplines and has produced a vast quantity of work on how we remember the past. Yet I found academic discussions on memory, dominated by memorial or commemorative responses to conflict or violence in public space, to be lacking something. This was a sense of how it feels to be going through processes of constructing a narrative after the disappearance of a relative, of what memory means to someone after a violent event, and an understanding of how people respond to such circumstances. However, I am not going to frame this discussion or this thesis as a critique of a field of study. What I want to do instead is to start afresh; to begin with an open conceptualisation of what this 'memory' might be and mean, where and when it might be found. This intuitive improvisation has framed my approach to this project, the research in Mexico, and in turn writing this thesis. I followed the traces of disappearance and found myself in territories I did not expect. Looking at life in the wake of disappearance brings into question not just our conceptualisation of memory, but fundamental assumptions about time, space, personhood, politics, absence, presence, and the state. The following discussion, then, is an attempt to bring together these debates, to highlight some of the problems I encountered in academic literature, and to push beyond others. In this I foreground what a focus on time and space might mean for memory, through the context of disappearance.

Disappearance has been defined as a concept in a relatively short space of time, and it has come to mean certain images, words, contexts, locations, and figures. Some historians and human rights organisations locate the origins of the practice of enforced disappearance to the 1941 Night and Fog Decree in Nazi Germany, which resulted in the internment of several thousand people in concentration camps (Gordon 2008, p.72). But the emblematic cases of enforced disappearance that have fundamentally shaped the way the term has come into law are the military dictatorships of the Southern Cone of Latin America: Uruguay, Brazil, Chile, and particularly, Argentina. Sociologist Gabriel Gatti has called this the "Argentine definition", the archetypal disappeared: enforced disappearance used as a tool for state

terrorism, undertaken by an authoritarian state against those it defines as political dissidents and subversives. He explains (2014, p.162, emphasis in original),

> [The Argentine definition] will be the yardstick for any other product of forced disappearance practices, whether or not it is carried out by the state, whether or not the fate of the disappeared person is unknown, whether or not the disappearing *dispositif* targeted its victims selectively and systematically, whether or not the victim is an individual, an ethnic group, a rural population, or a community of believers. Whatever the case, the definition has been enormously successful, and the concept of disappeared *invented* by "the last Argentine dictatorship" and later ratified by the United Nations in 2007 travels from one continent to another, through different times, virtually untouched by the disruptions normally encountered in such long journeys.

Whatever the local context of disappearance, the experience of Argentina created the parameters of the definition and a framework into which, we will see, Mexico does not neatly fit.

In 1994 the Organisation of American States (OAS) created the Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons, which Mexico signed and ratified (OAS 2018). And as mentioned in the Gatti quote above, in 2007 the United Nations created the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which again Mexico signed and ratified. This defines enforced disappearance as:

> the arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a person outside the protection of the law (United Nations 2007).

The disappeared, or a certain version of the disappeared, have entered the realm of and are recognised within international humanitarian law.

In contemporary Mexico, the legal definition of enforced disappearance can be a double-edged sword for relatives of the disappeared. For those who cannot prove the involvement of the state, and as we shall see disappearance in Mexico is often more complicated than the state terrorism of a military dictatorship, their cases fall outside the institutional structures for searching and for justice. The definition can create victim hierarchies and have material impacts on access to resources to search and investigate the crime. Resisting this, relatives of the disappeared instead simply use the term disappearance to describe the abductions and consequent lack of due process that they experience, and in this thesis I follow suit. This is a redefining of the term that represents the complexity of the context of violence they are living, where the lines between the state and organised crime are blurred. This strategy resists dividing and conquering the relatives and the resistance they are mounting, but also strategically uses international human rights law and its definition of enforced disappearance to engage mechanisms tactically, when it offers a productive way forward.

What this complicated definition and these problems in practice demonstrate, is how hard it is to define or to talk about disappearance. There is an act: a state agent or someone acting with the acquiescence of the state illegally deprives someone of their liberty, possibly kills them, although we do not know, and denies any existence of this action. The person disappears. But when we try and talk about the status of that person, we lose our way. They exist but do not exist. They are absent but present. They are not dead, but they are not here with us. The objects, places, and people that evidence that person, that have meaning relationally with that person, are still there, as traces of them and their life. But there is a glaring, painful, unexplained absence. Disappearance, then, disrupts our understandings of the world. It proves a challenge to memory and memorialisation – how to represent something so ambiguous – but it also challenges our concepts that frame modern life: time, the state, citizenship, identity. Sociologist Avery Gordon looked at disappearance and torture in Argentina to explore the idea of a haunted society, a society full of ghosts. She explains that a haunted society, if we pay attention to it, carries messages that we do not see in the spaces of treatises or reports or clinical case studies. A haunted society "is leading you elsewhere, it is making you see things you did not see before, it is making an

impact on you; your relation to things that seemed separate or invisible is changing" (Gordon 2008, p.98).

What we see with disappearance, then, is a new state of being, and the struggle to define this unknown entity is, in fact, the challenge of finding a place for it in the modern world of order that we live within (Gatti 2014, p.31). Human rights and legal professionals, academics, activists, and relatives have tussled to name and claim disappearance: "They tense the field, battling each other to build it, to establish its limits, to determine its contents, competing against one another to speak of the disappeared and on their behalf" (Gatti 2014, p.9). What we could do, however, is take disappearance with all the uncertainty it contains, and allow that to be. This uncertainty has been variously described as liminality, ambiguity, ghostly (Boss 1999; Gordon 2008; Gatti 2014; Robledo Silvestre 2014; Schwartz-Marin and Cruz-Santiago 2016a); words that capture the hard to define nature of disappearance. These conditions of disappearance challenge dominant assumptions about grief and trauma; that trauma and grief disrupt the progress of our lives, but that with therapy we can heal and move on. In the constant and ongoing ambiguity of disappearance, we see the now common use of words such as void, open wound, stasis, and frozen (Hogben 2006; Clark, L. B. 2010; Parr and Stevenson 2014; Blair Trujillo 2018). Yet these terms again become problematic. In trying to foster and keep open the ambiguity, the disappeared and their relatives can be reduced to something that seems to be stuck in time and space, which we need to preserve. They are not given the space or right to have agency, be dynamic, contradictory, drive change and formulate responses: to hold complex personhood.

In post-traumatic, post-conflict contexts, memory is highly politicised. Who gets to write the past becomes the conflict of the present, and memorialisation is used as a method through which punishment of atrocity can be circumvented, society can move on, reconciliation can be achieved, victims can be compensated, future atrocities will be prevented, and somehow justice can be reached (Jelin 1994; Edkins 2003b; Bianchini 2014). But despite this potential and responsibility afforded to memorials and memory work, memory is still seen as the softer binary to history, the cultural, subjective, and emotional as opposed to the rational, official, and truthful. In recent decades in Europe and the West we have seen a "memory boom", a "culture of

memory", which seems to stem from a fear of forgetting (Nora 1989; Huyssen 2003, p.17). The apparent boom in memory work and memorials has been critiqued, seen as too great a quantity by some, too far from the science of history, and a frantic response to capture everything (Nora 1989; Kritzman 1996; Berliner 2005; Bell 2006; Winter 2007; Ricoeur 2011).

The literature that has explored this so-called contemporary memory boom has centred on two general groups of memorials or memorial practices; state-led post-conflict memorials that attempt to draw closure and settle the past, and non-state counter-monuments that aim to invite contestation, engagement, and keep wounds open (Young 1992; Mitchell 2003; Hite 2012). Furthermore, Pierre Nora (1989; 1996) has described *lieux de mémoire*, places or sites of memory, constructed because there are no longer any *milieux de mémoire*, environments of memory that are part of everyday experience. Yet the ways that the terms memory and history are debated and their boundaries policed within academia, and the ways analysis of memorials falls into common themes, demonstrates to me that the current conception of memory is too limited. It is not flexible and responsive enough to reflect the reality of memory in social and political contexts, and disappearance is a case through which this is revealed.

What began as a non-state counter-memorial movement has in many ways been appropriated by states, international institutions, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) seeking to force closure on contested and unresolved human rights abuses and crimes, where narratives and desires of victims, relatives, or survivors are sidelined for a narrative that seeks to reconcile (Edkins 2003a; Clark, L. B. 2010; Jansen 2013; Moon 2013; Bevernage 2015). In recent decades memory work has become one of the cornerstones of transitional justice mechanisms (very much so in cases of mass enforced disappearance), promoted alongside truth-telling and reparation initiatives as substitutes to legal justice (Jelin 2007; Bianchini 2014). And although nationalist and other uses of memory are present, the concept of memory in Latin America specifically sits within a human rights frame, an association that arose because of the history of activism and the fight for memory of the disappeared in the Southern Cone countries.

Once in public space, memorials are intended to do some of the work of remembering on our behalf (Young 1992). Museums and memorials, even if critical or 'counter', even if involving victims or relatives or survivors, are still expected to be the site at which collective memory is practiced, held, and debated. Where the past is seen and felt. In academic writing on memorialisation there is a focus on these sites; the prominent, official, visible, and obvious sites: museums, memorials to the victims of war, transformed locations of atrocities and violence, and monuments that fill the streets of our cities (Mayo 1988; Sturken 1991; Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991; Young 1993; Winter 1995; Cooke 2000; Mitchell 2003; Knischewski and Spittler 2005; Barsalou and Baxtor 2007; Jelin 2007; Drinot 2009; Hite 2012; Salerno and Zarankin 2014). However, a focus on the things in public that catch our immediate attention means missing a great deal of activity at the margins, offstage. These are other important sites of memory that might not at first seem like memory or be immediately visible; other ways and other places in which memory is debated and practiced.

There are and have been, of course, alternative discourses which resist such binary thinking, or find more nuanced ways to describe lived practices of memory after conflict. Paul Connerton (2011) draws attention to the neglected bodily dimensions of remembering, as well as incorporated and inscribing practices. Phenomenologist Edward Casey (2011) examines participation in commemorative events as a practiced concept of memory, and highlights aspects of body memory and place memory. And Marianne Hirsch (2011) developed the concept of "postmemory" to explain how traumatic knowledge is passed across and through generations. These are just some examples. These inter-generational and embodied theories of memory mix complex combinations of social, bodily and place memory, as well as how and through what memory is shared, transmitted, and held. Andreas Huyssen (2003, p.28) labelled this experience "lived memory": memory that is dynamic, embodied in social spaces such as families and nations as much as individuals. This more fluid conception of memory makes space for acknowledging that memory is in constant negotiation, can be transmitted in various forms through various spaces, things, and actions, and experienced as embodied as well as in communities. Alexandre Dessingué develops these ideas. He (2011, p.176) states, "Memories are always shaped in relation to others. In fact, the traditional paradigm of individual and collective memory may even

lead to a non-sense, since the nature of memory is dialogical". It is these sorts of conceptualisations that I wish to build on in this thesis, this openness to the complexity of memory that can enable a different view of the day-to-day of living among and with memory, to capture the range of human and non-human actions and locations in which it is being practiced.

In the wake of (state) crimes and human rights violations such as disappearance, memory can be lived, be alive, and be part of a project to seek justice, by representing and visibilising crimes that are being erased. Victims need some sort of marker, some sort of public memorialising, particularly if decades have passed and society does not acknowledge the crime or injustice. But these commemorative acts need to resist language, symbolism, and rituals that de-politicise. This is the politics of memory with disappearance: representing the disappeared in order to demand justice and their right to be searched for, while negotiating their ambiguity. This is about fighting against some versions of memory as much as fighting against forgetting; to find a lived practice of memory that serves the demands of relatives of victims and survivors for truth and justice. But it is in the detail of how these demands are made and the politics of them, that we can see how these practices are connected to larger questions of liberal modernity. Huyssen (2003, p.4) notes this, commenting on the academic debate over the definitions of memory and history:

> Our contemporary obsessions with memory in the present may well be an indication that our ways of thinking and living temporality itself are undergoing a significant shift. This is what the whole academic debate about history vs. memory is subliminally all about, but we wouldn't know it by listening in.

The problem is, in order to question our notions of temporality we need frames and approaches that can accommodate an ontological shift. Our frameworks are often inadequate to grasp the current and lived dynamics of memory and temporality (Huyssen 2003, p.17).

In Western academia and transitional justice contexts, the term memory is underpinned by a specific linear conceptualisation of time. On the one hand, we see the passing of time as a threat to memory and remembering. The memory booms, the desire to record and archive, and the work to fix certain memories and versions of the

past, are part of this dynamic. The assumption is that forgetting is inevitable as time passes, unless we actively do something in the present to remember. On the other hand, time is seen as a vulnerable thing itself, under the modern conditions of time-space compression (Harvey 1990). This vulnerability potentially destabilises our concept of linear time. The present is being overwhelmed and squeezed by the past because of this memory boom, to an ever thinner and more fragile moment, the future is looming closer, and time and temporal boundaries have shrunk just as space has: "the boundary between past and present used to be stronger and more stable than it appears to be today" (Huyssen 2003, p.1).

Yet somehow it is also the role of memory to prevent this destabilisation. Memory is meant to ground us, root us, prevent the past repeating, firm up our sense of the world and the modern social order. In this linear conception of time, traumatic memory is seen as the past stuck in the present, preventing us from progressing forward into the future (Edkins 2003a; Hogben 2006; Bevernage and Colaert 2014). Much transitional justice work is based in this assumption, seeing the need to confront the past as a core premise, and that truth and remembrance are needed to heal wounds and move forwards. "With this closure, linear time is set straight again" (Bevernage and Colaert 2014, p.2). Historian Berber Bevernage (2008) critiques this "point like" time – that time is made up by an infinite series of point like moments – as a hindrance to our ability to think about the presence of the past. He explains (2008, p.24), "The specter, therefore, is not just a piece of the "traumatic" past popping up into the present; rather, its logic questions the whole traditional relationship between past, present, and future".

In modernity, the past is seen as ontologically weaker than the present. Bevernage and Aerts (2009) argue this is due to the past's association with death, and the separation of life and death that underwrites it. They argue (2009, p.404-405),

> (biological) death functions as a master-metaphor for the past. The strict juxtaposition of the 'present' present and the 'absent' or 'distant' past that is so central to both the modern regime of historicity and modern historiography is essentially a reflection of the separation between life and death that has been presumed to be absolute since the Enlightenment.

This is precisely the politics of time that the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, the mothers of the disappeared in Argentina, were aware of and resisting. The Argentine military knew that disappearance, unlike death, does not pass in time, and so they tried to define the disappeared as dead in an attempt to bury and close the issue in the past (Bevernage and Aerts 2009, p.396). The Madres and other relatives of disappeared and missing persons elsewhere, resist moves, including memorial ones, that work to place the disappeared in the past and write their story as finished, as closed (Robben 2005b; Bell and Di Paolantonio 2009; Bevernage and Aerts 2009; Hite and Collins 2009; Edkins 2011). However, there is also a spatial dimension to this politics of time, or to this modern regime of historicity, and this is to do with questions of absence and presence. To be present has a temporal and a spatial element. Bevernage and Aerts (2009, p.393) explain that in the Madres' regime of historicity, being past was not equated with being absent. Within the frame of liberal modernity to be in the past, to be dead, somehow also implies a spatial distance, and a politically and ontologically weaker position.

The concept of space in dominant Western frames is defined as vast and empty, without meaning, a blank canvas. Memory resides in places full of meaning, but space is neutral. Much critical work has taken place to demonstrate the constructed and socially produced nature of space (de Certeau 1984; Lefevbre 1991; Cresswell 2004; Massey 2005; Elden 2009). Geographer Doreen Massey (2005, p.13) argues that we need to move space from the group of concepts it has so long been embedded within – stasis, closure, representation, which I would suggest also map onto traditional descriptions of the past – to set it within ideas of heterogeneity, coevalness, and liveliness, which she suggests would open a more challenging political landscape. She posits, "space has so often been excluded from, or inadequately conceptualised in relation to, and has thereby debilitated our conceptions of, politics and the political" (2005, p.19).

The conceptualisation of space as an empty surface is a powerful idea with tangible implications for people and places, including the disappeared and their relatives. Conceiving of space as a surface on which disconnected things happen is part of a process of removing context: historical, cultural, geographical, social, and political.

Massey explored this in European colonisation and the lives of those colonised. She explains (2005, p.5),

> We are not to imagine them as having their own trajectories, their own particular histories, and the potential for their own, perhaps different, futures. They are not recognised as coeval others. They are merely at an earlier stage in the one and only narrative it is possible to tell. That cosmology of 'only one narrative' obliterates the multiplicities, the contemporaneous heterogeneities of space. It reduces simultaneous coexistence to place in the historical queue.

Modern concepts of space and time work together; linear time underpins the spatial development that she describes. Through the experience of disappearance in contemporary Mexico we will see these conceptualisations serve to depoliticise both the issue of disappearance itself and the demands and actions of those seeking to denounce it and search. They obscure the structures that are enabling and creating disappearance, they hide the continuity of disappearance within the narrative of modern progress and reduce cases of disappearance to unfortunate events. And in doing so, I argue in this thesis, they locate the disappeared and their relatives as outside of the norm, beyond the spaces of modernity that frame our social and political worlds.

Connections between geography and memory have been interrogated, but these often fall into several common tropes. Karen Till (2006a) describes studies of public memory that take a "biography of a site" approach: analysing why certain forms of memory emerge at certain moments and places, and in what form. She explains (2006a, p.327), "Biographies of sites typically provide nuanced depictions of the ways national histories, memorial cultures, and shared stories are remembered or forgotten, to analyse changes to existing public cultures of memory within a given country". This approach focuses on tangible memory spaces and objects such as museums, monuments, parades, or artistic work. Another common approach is to look through the frame of the politics of memory: how the production of memorials is part of a politics that inscribes some memories and places and people at the expense of others (Cresswell 2004, p.62). And finally, the metaphor of the palimpsest appears frequently, allowing us to conceive of a place that contains a plurality of memories and histories, a place where the traces of everything that has gone before are

embedded (de Certeau 1984, p.109; Huyssen 2003, p.1; Jelin 2007; Page 2013, p.xviii). But Massey cautions us against the use of the palimpsest, arguing that to frame space through its image restricts us to the imagination, yet again, of surfaces. She writes (2005, p.110-118),

> [The palimpsest] fails to bring alive the trajectories which co-form this space....it is not just buried histories at issue here, but histories still being made, now. Something more mobile than is implied by an archaeological dig down through the surfaces of the space of today. Something more temporal than the notion of space as a collage of historical periods.

But memory and place *are* deeply connected. Till (2012, p.6) explores some cities she considers as wounded, defined as "densely settled locales that have been harmed and structured by particular histories of physical destruction, displacement, and individual and social trauma resulting from state-perpetrated violence". These are wounds, or traumas, that are held in trans-generational cultural memory, but also in place. Gareth Hoskins (2010, p.261) works with the concept of the "narrative economy": "how place is made and remade through the exchange of stories that acquire value based on imperatives that vary across space and time". And Casey (1996) developed a phenomenological approach to place and memory, pushing towards a nuanced understanding of how memory and place are produced, experienced and practiced. Place, therefore, is not a container for memories, it does not fix them, but rather it is co-produced and practiced by communities that inhabit them.

In this thesis memory is an open concept. This is about being flexible to being shaped by the context of disappearance in Mexico, by not limiting and being limited by assumptions that may underpin memory, such as linear time, or what memory is used for, or where it is found. I am not critiquing the fields of transitional justice or memory studies, but am rather looking for tools to help us understand and think through what is happening in the wake of disappearance, when a battle for memory and for justice unfolds. I am pushing us to think through what these actions reveal to us about the world we inhabit and construct. The discussions and ideas touched upon here will all be expanded upon in the thesis in moments where they come to the fore or become palpable. But now I want to return to the issue of disappearance in Mexico,

to place this in its political and social context, and explore what this case challenges and exposes in our assumptions about disappearance.

Disappearance in Mexico

As we have seen, disappearance in contemporary Mexico is taking place at a rate comparable to military dictatorships elsewhere in Latin America, or worse, and our contemporary understanding of the concept of disappearance was shaped in this mould. But there are many factors that set disappearance in Mexico apart from those of the Southern Cone dictatorships. If we use the same analytical frameworks for understanding the context of disappearance from the 1970s military *juntas*, we will not grasp what it is that is happening in Mexico now. This is the caution that Gatti (2014, p.166) gave; the Argentine definition can dominate the aesthetic, historical, and social, and erase differences. By not understanding the context or listening well to the stories of those living the experience in Mexico, we will fail to grasp the crisis, and fail to analyse it well.

Disappearance in contemporary Mexico is not taking place under military dictatorship but electoral democracy. The victims are not part of an ideological struggle between an authoritarian state and left-wing citizens. Some, but not all, disappearances are politically motivated. The dynamics of the war on drugs change quickly and vary across the country. The scale of disappearance is obscured and when talking about memory this is not a post-war or transitional context; disappearance is increasing every year (SEGOB 2018). Instead, disappearance in Mexico must be seen within a long history of state violence and impunity. Current disappearances "form part of a 'present continuous' of [Mexico's], now long history of population management" (Gatti 2018, no page).

The violence that the war on drugs both legitimises and masks stands out because of the levels it has reached. However, state violence and violent conditions in Mexico are not something that began with the war on drugs. In her book *Cruel Modernity*, Jean Franco (2013, p.5) argues that modernity was inaugurated with the Spanish conquest of the Americas, giving Europe an advantage over other worlds. So

modernity as a project in Mexico, as elsewhere, began with Spanish colonisation, and was developed to a greater extent with independence in 1821 and the founding of Mexico as a nation-state (Roldán Vera and Caruso 2007; Millar 2008, p.1). Modernity is hard to define and is heterogeneous. It can be ideology and identity as well as modes of practice and organisation (Latham 1997, p14). But by modernity I am referring to a set of ideas that can be traced to European Enlightenment: rational human agency, scientific exploration, and the conquering of space and time, (Latham 1997, p.14; Millar 2008, p.4). Modernity in Latin America professed to be striving for greater justice, sovereignty, and liberty (Millar 2008, p4) but Franco (2013, p.9) argues it was also founded on cruelty and violence, where a privileged few enjoyed civility and the underprivileged masses experienced violence routinely.

Liberal modernity, a specific manifestation of modernity which was organised around "open international economic exchange, domestic market relations, the liberal governance of the polity, individual and group rights, and the right of collective self-determination" (Latham 1997, p.17), provided the context for the newly independent nation-states of Latin America, including Mexico, that installed liberal republics as their model of political organisation (Peloso and Tenenbaum 1996; Rodríguez 2009; Aguilar Rivera 2012). There is much academic debate within political science as to whether Mexico can be defined as modern (Aguilar Rivera 2012, p.xxi), democratic (La Botz 1995; Morris 1995; Serrano 1998; Tulchin and Selee 2003; al Camp 2007), or is in fact a failed state (Grayson 2011). But since independence and the founding of the Mexican state there have been liberal institutions, ideas, and practices built in to the nation.

In 1824 Mexico wrote a constitution which proclaimed inalienable rights for its citizens of liberty, legal equality, security, and property, and which separated the powers of the executive, judiciary, and legislature, with the executive weaker than the legislature (Aguilar Rivera 2012, p.xiv). However, from the founding of the nation these ideals were never fully applied. In his book *The Mexican Exception*, Gareth Williams (2011) examines the contemporary violence and apparent exceptionalism of the war on drugs, and argues that this 'state of exception' is in fact not a moment, but integral to modern and contemporary Mexico. He (2011, p.12) explains, "modernity in Mexico was orchestrated by a total state that strived at all times to suppress the

duality of state and society". Despite the guise of liberal modernity, the state was violent. Williams explains how the normalisation of extraordinary power began in the 1920s. In the wake of the Mexican Revolution most new legislation and government bodies came about through presidential decree. He (2011, p.28) describes,

> Traditional *caciquismo* [the rule of a chief or boss, a kind of clientelism], in other words, became supplemented by bureaucratic authoritarianism and in just a few years the presidency had become so powerful that it was practically synonymous with the Mexican political system in its entirety.

This *presidencialismo* compacted by the Partido Revolucionario Institutional (Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI) and its version of authoritarianism combined Revolutionary-inspired consensus, political liberalism and single-term presidencies, alongside electoral fraud and social control (Middlebrook 1986; Morris, 1995; Chand, 2001; al Camp, 2007).

Liberal modernity in Mexico, then, appears in the façade of institutions, laws, and rights. Violence, it seems, is not just a part of a 'failed' liberal democracy but, as Franco explained with modernity, is integral to the system. Paraphrasing Charles Bowden, Franco (2013, p.216) states, in Latin America "Violence is now woven into the very fabric of the community and had no single cause and no single motive and no on-off button". In Mexico, then, disappearance is not a series of unfortunate isolated events but is generalised and produced by the political and social systems and structures of the nation state, and as we shall see in this thesis, it reveals that modern and liberal norms and procedures in Mexico can be ignored and manipulated.

Mexico is not recognised domestically or internationally as a country in which enforced disappearance is, and has historically been, a widespread problem. Both internally and externally Mexico projects an image of a democratic, peaceful country in development (Flores Solana 2012, p.8). In fact, even before the military juntas of the Southern Cone had taken power, the Mexican state was undertaking a dirty war against its citizens (Arroyo 2009; Flores Solana 2012; Karl 2014a; Karl 2014b; Calveiro Garrido 2018; López Ovalle 2018; Pineda 2018). The 1968 Tlatelolco student massacre in Mexico City is seen as its symbolic beginning, which lasted until the early 1980s (Poniatowska 1991; Karl 2014a, p.728; López Ovalle 2018). During

this period approximately 1,220 people were disappeared, with the first recorded case of enforced disappearance in 1969 (Flores Solana 2012; Karl, 2014b). The majority of these disappearances took place in the southern state of Guerrero by soldiers targeting indigenous peasant populations, which is where the Ayotzinapa students were disappeared decades later (Doyle 2006; Williams 2011, p.163; COMVERDAD 2014; Karl 2014a). However, Sylvia Karl (2014a, p.727) argues, "Unlike other Latin American countries where it is well known that people were abducted and disappeared during repressive military regimes in the 1960s and 1970s, in Mexico the dirty war is still invisible".

Since the dirty war, there have been cases of disappearance consistently throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s (Calveiro Garrido 2018). But it was with the change in government in 2000, and then the start of the war on drug trafficking and organised crime in 2006, known as the war on drugs, when disappearance reached the epidemic levels we see today (Calveiro Garrido 2018). The history of institutional democracy and politics in Mexico is key to understanding the contemporary political situation (La Botz 1995; Morris 1995; Serrano 1998; Hamnett 1999; Chand 2001; Tulchin and Selee 2003; Otero 2004; al Camp 2007). Following the Mexican Revolution, the Partido Revolucionario Nacional (PRI, National Revolutionary Party) governed Mexico from 1929 to 2000. In the 2000 general election the PRI lost the presidency to Partido Acción Nacional (PAN, National Action Party) candidate Vicente Fox, ushering in what was then seen as the beginning of a democratic transition. However, as political scientist Raúl Benítez Manaut (2009, no page) has described, in Mexico "there is democracy, but its quality is precarious". The 2006 presidential elections brought Felipe Calderón to power, also of the PAN, but he secured a less than one percent majority (Bruhn and Greene 2007, p.33). In an attempt to legitimise his presidency Calderón's first act in office was a demonstration of strength: Operación Michoacán, a military operation to fight drug cartels in his home state (Fondevila and Quintana-Navarrete 2015; Saviano 2015).

This was the beginning of the war on drugs, which would escalate in those first years and continue through Calderón's presidency. Aside from Calderón's desire to demonstrate strength and leadership, Mexico was under pressure from the United States (US) to tackle drug trafficking (Fondevila and Quintana-Navarrete 2015,

p.519). The Mérida Initiative, an enormous funding package from the US to support the Mexican military in the war on drugs, came into effect in 2008 (Benítez Manaut 2009; Astorga and Shirk 2010; Rosen and Zepeda Martínez 2015). Additionally, Mexico suffered from a balloon effect of interdiction policies implemented in Colombia. The destruction of crops in Colombia led to an increase in drug cultivation, violence, and drug trafficking activities in Mexico (LSE 2014, p.29). After just twelve years of PAN rule, Mexican voters elected Enrique Peña Nieto of the PRI, who continued the same approach to the war on drugs. The results of this militarisation in Mexico have been devastating: since 2006 government figures have recorded well over 200,000 violent deaths as well as the almost 37,000 disappeared (INEGI 2018).

The war on drugs and the dynamics and history of drug production and trafficking in Mexico is complex, with many actors and internal and external influences shaping the dynamic and ever-changing situation on the ground. The majority of drug production occurs in the agricultural and generally impoverished states of Guerrero, Michoacán, Sinaloa, and Durango, and since the modernisation of the agricultural sector, started by President Carlos Salinas in 1990 and linked to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Mexico's agricultural sector has been in steady decline (Bartra 2004, p.22). Into this context flowed a vast quantity of drugs and money. Currently eighty percent of US-bound cocaine travels through Mexico (OAS 2013, p.47), and Mexico is the major producer of marijuana and heroin in Latin America, both grown in mountainous rural areas. More recently cartels have diversified into the production of synthetic drugs (OAS 2013, p.32). Flowing in the opposite direction and fuelling the violence are arms: ninety percent of guns in Mexico originate from the US (Rosen and Zepeda Martínez 2015, p.159).

The Organisation of American States (OAS) highlight that it is the transit of drugs, as opposed to production or consumption, which generates most crime and violence in countries where it occurs (OAS 2013, p.75). Mexico is bearing witness to this. In 2006 as President Calderón began his war on drugs, homicide rates had been falling steadily since 2000 and were at their lowest on record (Karl 2014b, p.12; LSE 2014; Open Society Foundations 2016). With the loss of PRI power nationwide from 2000, trafficking routes across Mexico were destabilised as illicit agreements between local law enforcement and cartels were disrupted (Astorga and Shirk 2010; Morton 2012).

Then, in 2006, the war on drugs sought to eliminate (either kill or arrest) leaders of cartels. The effect has been a splintering of criminal organisations, fighting for territory and control of trafficking routes in the power vacuums that were created (Astorga and Shirk 2010; Morton 2012; Calderón et al 2015; Guerrero Gutiérrez 2016). These cartels have diversified their work into extortion, human trafficking, rapid kidnapping, money laundering, and generalised violent crime, as well as into other industries such as oil pipeline tapping, illegal mining, and construction (Nájar 2012; Franco 2013; Mastrogiovanni 2014; Saviano 2015). But what has also been revealed is the extent to which state agents are involved with and working for organised crime, alongside their day jobs as police or other agents (Nájar 2012; Saviano 2015).

Yet, drug related violence alone does not explain the deaths and disappearances of the past twelve years. A criminalising narrative has prevailed, assuming any victim of violence must, by virtue of being murdered or disappeared, have been involved in organised crime (Reguilo 2011; Karl 2014b, p.15; Boudreaux 2016). The war on drugs has been used as a smoke screen for other targeted violence (Open Society Foundations 2016, p.12) and many disappearances are carried out by state agents (Amnesty International 2013; Human Rights Watch 2013). On his visit to Mexico in 2015, Zeid Raad Al Hussein, the UN High Commissioner (2015, no page) reported:

> Part of the violence can be laid at the door of the country's powerful and ruthless organized crime groups...But many enforced disappearances, acts of torture and extra-judicial killings are alleged to have been carried out by federal, state and municipal authorities, including the police and some segments of the army, either acting in their own interests or in collusion with organized criminal groups.

The militarisation of the country in the name of the war on drugs has provided a mechanism through which to eliminate political opposition of any form, while the media and government push a narrative that criminalises the victims and removes state responsibility for the violence (Karl 2014b, p.12; Fondevila and Quintana-Navarrete 2015, p.519). An internal enemy – *narcos* – have been framed, militarisation is the unfortunate but necessary response, and a vulnerable population is the collateral damage (Gatti 2018, no page).

Until 2012 there was almost no data on who the victims of disappearance were, where it was happening, and why. There are certain geographical dynamics, and some people are certainly more vulnerable than others but, in truth, anyone can be a victim of this violence: "Some seem to be connected to criminal networks; in other cases there are indications that they have been victims of human trafficking; others still correspond with social or political activists, but a large quantity of people who disappear are inexplicable" (Calveiro Garrido 2018, no page). The majority of people who disappear in Mexico are young men in their late teens and twenties, however in certain places women are targeted (SEGOB 2018). Although the majority are working age, over a thousand children under ten years of age have been disappeared, and 1,603 people over sixty (SEGOB, 2018). In certain states at certain moments people with specific skills were targeted, such as engineers, chemists, and telecommunications experts (Amnesty International 2013). Men have been forced into labouring for cartels in drug production, and women have been trafficked for sex work. Vulnerable Central American migrants disappear while travelling through Mexico to the US (Nájar 2012). And indigenous leaders, environmental activists, human rights defenders, journalists, and political opposition are targets (Mastrogiovanni 2014). It is also not clear what has happened to these people. Hundreds of clandestine graves tell one aspect of this story, but there are also cases where people have been found alive, illegally held within military compounds (Reveles 2015, p.14).

If there turns out to be an explanation for why someone was taken that day, on that highway, at that moment, it often has nothing to do with the actions of that person but with the dynamics of a conflict they found themselves in. Fundamentally, disappearance in Mexico happens because it can happen, because of chronic impunity (Zepeda Lecuona 2004; Acosta Urquidi 2012). Currently ninety-eight percent of all crimes in Mexico are unresolved, the majority of which are never properly investigated (Al Hussein 2015; Open Society Foundations 2016). No one has been prosecuted for the 1968 student massacre and fifty years later there still is no official figure for the number killed that day (Poniatowska 1991; Williams 2011, p132). The authorities still "continue to investigate" the first reported case of enforced disappearance from 1969 (López Ovalle 2018, no page). Mexico's federal court has achieved six convictions for enforced disappearance in its history (Meyer and Suarez-Enriquez 2016), and in 2015 Mexico came second on the Global Impunity Index (Le

Clercq Ortega and Rodríquez Sánchez Lara 2015). On a recent visit to Mexico to report on human rights defenders, United Nations Special Rapporteur Michel Forst (2017) explained, "Impunity has become both the cause and the effect of the overall insecurity of human rights defenders in Mexico". Impunity in Mexico, therefore, is pervasive, and it protects all perpetrators including state actors and state crime. Furthermore, because disappearance thrives on structural impunity the state has a responsibility for the crime even when the perpetrator was not a direct agent of the state; what the United Nations (2007) definition of enforced disappearance describes as acquiescence.

Some commentators argue that the war on drugs is a resurgence of, or possibly an extension of, the dirty war of the 1970s (Karl 2014b; Mastrogiovanni 2014), a line of argumentation that acknowledges how this state violence is structural. But Pilar Calveiro Garrido warns against too simply conflating these two moments because the quantity of unexplainable disappearances marks this contemporary period of violence apart from the 1970s. Although impunity and state abuse has continuity, other aspects of the context have changed: "The state has changed, dissidents have changed, the world has changed" (Calveiro Garrido 2018, no page). In Mexico, unlike the Southern Cone countries (Bianchini 2014), their dirty war is not written into the heritage and memory of the nation. Perhaps until Ayotzinapa, there was a failure to recognise mass disappearance in a democracy, a failure to see state terrorism in the context of the war on drugs. Although many Mexicans are not aware of the historical violence of the dirty war, since 2006 the violence, and the state's involvement in it, has been harder to ignore: "The idea that the main violators of people's security are those in charge of protecting it is so diffuse in Mexico, that it is common to hear phrases such as "never speak to a police officer" and "watch out for the army"" (Gargallo Celentani 2014, p.68-69).

Disappearance in contemporary Mexico is characterised by ambiguity. We are stumbling around in the dark for answers and explanations, we cannot yet see the full picture. But we can see parts of the structure that enables it, parts of the answer. It is happening to all sorts of people, and the dynamics of the war on drugs and the geographies of each region shape it. We can also see that disappearance is not, in fact, a contemporary problem, but has a long-standing unrecognised history shaped by

impunity. State violence, exceptionality, has always been there, however it has been erased from public debate, not part of a broad public memory, barely marked. We cannot wait until there is a clear narrative of what is going on to respond and analyse the situation, we need to accept the ambiguity and move ahead with it. We can learn from, but cannot fall back on, explanations of disappearance from military dictatorships that can be framed ideologically, nor can we dismiss disappearance in Mexico as criminal violence. The reality is it is more complex than that, and while we try to see it clearly, relatives and other activists are fighting for justice and memory.

Conclusions

In this thesis I am following memory and memorialisation of the disappeared in an electoral democracy, at a time when disappearances are happening at an extreme rate. This temporally and spatially challenges the ways memory tends to be talked about in academic spaces and in the practitioner deployment of memory work: it is in the present. In this context, memory is lived and practiced as a response to everyday life, an unplanned and organic response to the violent present. We also know that disappearance, due to its liminality, is always present, it does not pass into the past, despite political attempts to make this happen. In disappearance we are not talking about a past – at least not a past in the sense of the linear time of modernity: stable, defined, delimited, and dead. And for this reason it challenges some fundamental assumptions that underpin liberal modernity, and reveals to us questions about living and being in the world.

In Mexico, not only is there an opportunity to follow memory and responses to disappearance as they are unfolding, rather than once they are neatly understood and located in a past, but Mexico forces us to question our assumptions about disappearance itself, and the conditions under which it happens. In this thesis I follow the traces of the disappeared, and this has taken me to spaces and sites of the production of memory; public and private, visible and invisible, that destabilise the idea of a site of memory. This thesis is motivated by reconceptualising memory beyond common assumptions about who, how, where, and when memory work happens. Rather than staying within the realm of the politics of memory and state

endorsed memory sites, looking at the responses of relatives of the disappeared and those who accompany them reveals that these debates are actually asking bigger questions; of our concepts of absence, time, space, personhood, and the state. But by focussing on discussions such as memory versus history, memory and forgetting, and the ways the state attempts to narrate the past, these questions are often missed. While touching on these discussions, I want to move beyond them.

This thesis is based in empirical research, and builds from a focus on public memorials and a politics of memory, through various responses to disappearance that explore art, making, and life with absence, and ends with the search that the relatives of the disappeared undertake. Chapter 2, *The traces of presence: methodology* describes the methodology of the project, and discusses the ethical and practical questions that arose. Chapter 3, *Memorials to the Disappeared*, begins to sketch the visible landscape of memorials to the disappeared in several cities in Mexico, and the politics of time and space in them. Chapter 4, *Memoryscapes*, takes a step back from looking at memorials on a site-by-site basis, and instead thinks about living and moving through an affective memoryscape, which includes the visible and invisible traces of violence and absence. Chapter 5, *Bordando por la Paz y la Memoria*, looks in detail at this memory project which embroiders handkerchiefs for the victims of the war on drugs in public space, rehumanising victims and rebuilding worlds in the wake of their destruction. Chapter 6, *The Presence of Absence*, moves to think about how the ambiguous loss of disappearance is experienced and practiced in everyday lives, through spaces, objects, and rituals, and reveals deep relationality. Chapter 7, *Huellas de la Memoria*, returns to examining one project in detail, and this time thinks through the practice of making, translating, and materiality, to communicate the experience of disappearance. Chapter 8, *The Search*, then examines the searches that relatives of the disappeared undertake to find those missing, how this is a process that challenges state and other power and expertise, and is a transformative process for those who do it. Woven throughout these chapters, however, are common themes of materiality, representation, traces, transformation, the claiming of public space, and a politics of time. Chapter 9, *Life in the world of disappearance*, brings together what has been examined across the thesis to think through what these actions and people are revealing about the construction of liberal modernity and its social order. This raises and addresses the fundamental questions that appear through the world-

shattering experience of disappearance. Finally, Chapter 10, *Conclusion* draws together the conclusions and contributions of this thesis and makes some final reflections on the state of disappearance in Mexico.

Chapter 2: The traces of presence: methodology

> *There were no maps for ordinary people to guide them through the city. You made your way by sight, by memory, by history, by advice, by direction – and by luck*
> Daniel Defoe (Journal of the Plague Year, in Merlin Coverley 2010, p.37)

Underlying this research is the impossibility of searching for absence. The impossibility of researching the disappeared, people who are not there, conceptually, but also doing so in a context where the crime is not something of the past but continuing with greater frequency and impunity, where relatives who search for their missing are murdered for doing so. Beyond the dynamics of absence and presence are the impossibilities of representation, of an equal exchange in research, of a 'pure' collaboration, and the impossibility of living and working in an insecure environment. What also became clear when undertaking this research was the impossibility of any written or formalised methods to capture the complexity of the issue and the insecure context. I found, as did Alan Latham (2003, p.1998), critiquing methodological practice within human geography, that "We simply do not have the methodological resources and skills to undertake research that takes the sensuous, embodied, creativeness of social practice seriously". In this project I wanted to explore the co-production of memory and place, of everyday lived experience, of environments of memory, and how people respond to and live among markers and traces of absence and the disappeared.

I initially planned to take two three-month fieldwork trips to Mexico, however as the first planned trip loomed closer the challenges of conducting it loomed higher. Several incidents occurred in Mexico that unsettled the assumptions I had been working within – of what was possible, what was safe, and how to conduct my research and myself. It was not that my entire approach was no longer possible, but that I felt acutely uncertain, and this forced me to think deeply about actually how, practically, it would be possible to research contemporary disappearance in Mexico. Responding to this, I decided a short month-long pilot trip would be the best way forward which I took in November 2015 to test the ground, tentatively putting my feet down to see how it felt. And it was precisely that 'feeling' that was the key to moving

forwards. Against academic rationality and objectivity, methodologies and risk assessments, in the end my ethical and methodological decisions were guided by feeling, experiencing, observing, and reflecting. We can never see the full picture, indeed we can only know the world from our own standpoint (Haraway 1988). Fieldwork and research are processes where it is necessary to accept some uncertainty, the impossibility of control. The pilot showed me that this project could be possible, so in February 2016 I returned to Mexico for another four months of research. I undertook observation, ethnography, interviews, participation, and mapping, (all of which will be explored in detail) however there were several themes that wove across them all: questions of phenomenology, autoethnography, storying and representation, and collaboration.

In their book *Improvising Theory*, which follows the dynamics of anthropological fieldwork, Allaine Cerwonka and Liisa Malkki argue, "Fieldwork is always already a critical *theoretical* practice; a deeply and inescapably *empirical* practice; and a necessarily *improvisational* practice" (Cerwonka 2007, p.6, my emphasis). I find this frame very useful to understanding my own work: a constant conversation between what you are seeing and hearing, what you know and understand, and how you traverse this in context. Cerwonka (2007, p.19) explains, "the interpretive process involves a continuous movement between explanations (theories) about the object or process at issue and the parts that force adjustment or reaffirm the researcher's initial "guessing"". In general, methods are taught and prescribed in a standardised manner as a range of tools that can be selected and applied as necessary, and our methodologies become invisible in the final product, relegated to a few lines and not subject to theoretical enquiry. Instead in this project, drawing on long history of feminist and ethnographic methodologies, I tried to nurture certain sensibilities to guide a research practice that was (hopefully) both sensitive and practical.

Phenomenology is often framed as theory or philosophy rather than method, a distinction I believe to be false. I do not believe that simply being somewhere and seeing something necessarily enables understanding, as Margarethe Kusenbach (2003, p.461, emphasis in original) explains when writing of a 'phenomenological ethnography': "becoming and being a privileged insider does not provide *automatic* clues to other locals' lived experiences". However, it seemed instinctive in this project

to practice methods that foregrounded and tried to capture a sense of experience (both mine and people I spoke to): a phenomenological sensibility. Given that I was seeking to understand memory in the everyday and the co-production of memory and space, a phenomenological sensibility, or ethnography, took seriously the micro ways and places in which these practices might be occurring.

My diary was my space to capture, develop, and express what I was experiencing. I wrote notes on the details of my conversations and site visits; the time, day, how it felt, where it was, as well as details of what was said, how it was said, who that person was, how it connected to other things I was thinking and had heard, and my general sense of the interaction. As a method, keeping a diary is a tool for several methodological approaches, including autoethnography. Autoethnography foregrounds the emotions and experience of the researcher to embrace the inevitably subjective nature of research and knowledge (Butz and Besio 2009, p.1662). This draws on the theoretical work of feminist researchers in the 1980s, and the development of feminist standpoint theory. Challenging the prevalent ideas of objectivity and rationality in science, feminist standpoint theory essentially reclaims the concept of objectivity, arguing that what was presented as 'objective' is in fact the subjective position of the Western male, and that "Feminist objectivity means quite simply *situated knowledges*" (Haraway 1988, p.581, emphasis in original). In feminist standpoint theory, objectivity is gained through reflexivity and acknowledgement of one's own situated experience. Donna Haraway (1988), Sandra Harding (1992), and others, argue that the 'view from nowhere' approach to science is in fact anything but scientific, allowing knowledge to be constructed from a very narrow standpoint. They push instead for a 'view from somewhere':

> I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims....I am arguing for the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity (Haraway 1988, p.589).

Underlying autoethnographic approaches is an embracing of the embodied and subjective, a rejection of the construction of researcher as 'outside of' the research,

and a reflexive and self-aware approach to the research context (Besio and Butz 2004; Besio 2005; Butz and Besio 2009; Dauphinee 2010; Löwenheim 2010). "The objective was to destabilize ethnographic authority by writing in a way that emphasized the socially and politically constituted nature of knowledge claims" (Butz and Besio 2009, p.1662). A common critique of autoethnography and other researcher-centered methodologies is that they are navel gazing. I have been very concerned by this; worried about focusing on my experiences, my situated knowledge, rather than the stories and experiences of people I meet. However, David Butz and Kathryn Besio again take forward the idea of a sensibility, and describe an autoethnographic sensibility as a "sensitivity to the autoethnographic characteristics of what we learn from research participants as well as to our own situatedness in relation to the people and worlds we are studying" (Butz 2000, p140, cited in Butz and Besio 2009, p.1664). What an autoethnographic sensibility can accomplish is to highlight the connections of the self to the world that is being investigated (Dauphinee 2010, p.806). A key element in this sensibility is to challenge the false distinction between researcher and researched, while still recognising certain inequalities that will always exist. This entails recognising the people we speak to are autoethnographers of their own lives, experiences and stories, and that research is unfolding in an expanded field where narratives from 'researcher' and 'researched' mix in a complex network of social relations (Butz and Besio 2009, p.1671).

In my research I listened to many stories of people searching for missing relatives and the details of how they disappeared. I also heard stories of the context. Rather than personal experience of violence, these stories explained the conflict and analysed their circumstances. Stories (memories) of the war and of disappearance are layered into the geographical and social fabric of Mexico, and are part of the complex that produces memory and space. Stories are not something to be dismissed (Disch 2003). Reflecting on her research interviewing Holocaust survivors, Danielle Drozdzewski (2015, p.30) comments, "Through a process of retrospective reflexivity, I now realise that these cultural memories were not the only 'product' of my research, but that how they were narrated *and* how I dealt with them were also a significant part of the research process". There is, of course, a politics of representation and speaking, in these research situations. Richa Nagar, who has written about her experiences of collaborative research with a group of women in India, explains that telling stories

involves delicate negotiations and it is impossible to ever access others 'lived experiences'. She argues (2014, p.14) that only through contextualisation can we "represent structures of violence without reducing them to accessible narratives that re-enact the very violence that "we" seek to confront". In an interview discussing her documentary films, Trinh T. Minh-Ha describes her concept of 'talking nearby', as opposed to 'talking about' (Chen, 1992). She describes it as:

> a speaking that does not objectify, does not point to an object as if it is distant from the speaking subject or absent from the speaking place. A speaking that reflects on itself and can come very close to a subject without, however, seizing or claiming it....To say therefore that one prefers not to speak about but rather to speak nearby, is a great challenge. Because actually, this is not just a technique or a statement to be made verbally. It is an attitude in life, a way of positioning oneself in relation to the world" (Minh-Ha in Chen 1992, p.87).

These ideas informed my research and in practice meant paying attention to the context from which people were speaking. It meant a dedication to respect for people, their lives, time, and experiences. It meant reflecting on my positionality and my presence in their spaces. It was a practice of ethics, making choices about how to conduct myself and where and when to contribute. But it was also an acknowledgement that these things are messy and complex and hard to navigate: an improvisation, in Cerwonka and Malkki's terms. In this thesis I am not at the centre of the narrative, a political choice to give space to the experiences that were shared with me and are quite frankly more important and interesting than my experience of these. But it is also crucial and politically responsible to acknowledge the structures that have shaped the research, and an autoethnographic sensibility helps achieve this. Jenny Edkins (2013, p.290) suggests that simply dropping the pretence that the author was 'not there' is enough to disrupt the fictive distancing (also Besio 2005, p.322; Inayatullah 2011, p.5; Drozdzewski and Dominey-Howes 2015). As feminist standpoint epistemology highlighted, the problem with fictive distancing is the illusion there is no subjective author.

I approached this research with a collaborative sensibility. I wanted to work with people I met on the projects they were undertaking, to give my time and energy, not

just extract information and ideas and leave. I wanted to offer my skills (such as language) and access to the (small, but international) audiences I have. I wanted to learn about the issues and complexities of disappearance from those experiencing it and fighting it first hand, and listen to how practically to support relatives in their search. This approach was somewhere between solidarity, activism, and collaboration. It may be termed responsibility, or ethics. This is not, in any way, to claim that this thesis is 'helping' those experiencing disappearance in Mexico. But that my behavior and positioning of myself in relation to that world was guided by an openness to collaboration and by respect. Of her experience, Nagar (2006, p.XXXIX) explained,

> Whenever I became anxious about how this division of labor gave me the power to represent the collective and this journey, the group tried to allay my concerns by reminding me that forming an alliance was primarily about strategically combining, not replicating, our complementary skills.

Rather than un-critically dominating spaces and speaking for, or being self-reflexive to the point of paralysis, Nagar shows us there is a nuanced space to productively work together, within and alongside academia. She explains (2006, p.XL) that her concerns, as the academic in the group, of writing and representing the others, were in fact part of an internalisaton of the idea of 'expert' she was trying to dismantle. In her follow-up book on scholarship and activism Nagar explains that rather than providing methodological guidance for how to work across the border of academia and activism, she questions the utility of such neat categories: "I underscore the necessity of muddying theories and genres so that we can continue to embrace risks of solidarities that might fail and of translations that might refuse to speak adequately" (Nagar 2014, p.14).

There are several other practical details that were shaped by the research context and were also underpinned by my methodological and ethical choices. This research was undertaken in my second language, a language in which I am not fluent, and although competent, expressing myself feels limited. I have also, therefore, translated these conversations, and these translations are marked by my experiences. I was granted permission from my university to use oral consent in my interviews due to the sensitivity of the subject matter. Those I spoke with knew who I was and what I was doing, and those who opened up to me wanted to share. Conversations took place in

cafes, workshops, at events and in plazas. However, the majority of my interactions would not be described as interviews. Instead, these were conversations, some brief and fleeting, others continued over many days and meetings.

Although the process of research was much more instinctive and improvisational than it now appears, in hindsight I can see and have gathered the thesis around three strands: research on memorials and memory sites; participation in collective arts projects; and following relatives of the disappeared and wider movements searching for the missing. This methodology chapter follows with sections on each of these. The methodological and ethical threads already discussed, of narrative, ethnography and autoethnography, phenomenology, and collaboration, weave throughout, alongside a detailed account of the methods used for each of these three areas. Although, for example, in what follows mapping is discussed in relation to memorials, participation in relation to the arts projects, and ethnography in relation to relatives of the disappeared, these methods and ideas are in fact present in each area. They blend and overlap, they 'muddy' in Nagar's terms. Throughout, furthermore, the methodological and theoretical are blurred in an instinctive attempt to challenge "the problematic division between "abstract thinking" and "concrete doing"" (Nagar 2014, p.2). Finally, the question of insecurity in the research is explored, as a stand out issue that shaped the possibilities of the project.

Memory sites and memorials

Although an aim of this project is to move beyond the focus on formal memorials in memory studies, geography and politics, I wanted to know the (very few) memorials and memory spaces that have been constructed in response to contemporary violence and disappearance in Mexico. I needed to be aware of the public conversation on memory and ways that the discource is experienced. This was a manageable and safe (in terms of my capacity and insecurity) place to begin during the pilot and continued throughout the longer research trip. In Mexico City there are several memorials and memory sites which address state violence. The state-led Memorial a las Víctimas de la Violencia (Memorial to the Victims of the Violence) and interventions within it; the Museo Casa de la Memoria Indómita (Museum House of Tireless Memory), a space

to remember victims of enforced disappearance since Mexico's dirty war; and the +43 antimonumento (+43 anti-monument), a monument constructed by activists in the centre of the city. In addition to these I visited memorials to other significant events in Mexican history, such as the memorial and museum to the 1968 Tlatelolco student massacre and the monuments to Revolution and Independence.

I visited the cities Monterrey in Nuevo León and Cuernavaca in Morelos, both places that suffered (and still suffer) high levels of violence, to see examples of public memorialisation and learn about experiences beyond Mexico City. In Monterrey I visited the Plaza de los Desaparecidos (Square of the Disappeared) and memorialisation efforts on the site of the Casino Royale massacre. In Cuernavaca I visited the Ofrenda de las Víctimas de la Violencia (Altar for the victims of the violence) and the Árbol de la Memoria (Tree of Memory) in the city's central square; a newly installed memorial to victims of a shooting (Memorial 28 de Marzo); and interventions on the UAEM university campus. In addition to these visits, I recorded and observed graffiti and other informal responses that referred to victims of violence and enforced disappearance. And finally, I went to many museums, exhibitions, theatre performances, and temporary installations on a wide range of themes that relate to this project, from violence to memory to exile to testimony.

These sites were 'researched' in several ways. Observation was undertaken at each (Sanger 1996; Silverman 2011), noting who was visiting these sites at various times of the day and at various moments throughout the weeks and months. I observed how people were behaving, what they were doing and how they responded to the sites, and what I could assume about who they were. Where possible, I spoke to and interviewed people and organisations behind these sites or interventions in them. And when incidents happened that involved them or changed the discourse around them I visited again, for example when the +43 antimonumento had slogans spray-painted on it or when new names were added to the Memorial a las Víctimas de la Violencia. When possible, I participated in commemorative activities and events, at these sites or elsewhere. And for every visit photographs and notes were taken, a diary entry written afterwards, and informal conversations grabbed with people at the sites. Yet, I wanted to push further than these methods, and try to capture these sites and other broader spatialities in a more visual, holistic, and experiential way. My aim was to try to find

methods or approaches that enabled our understanding to go beyond the "biography of a site" approach to place and memory (Till 2006), to thinking about how memory functions in our everyday life as a landscape.

In Chapter 1 I set out the argument that place and memory are deeply connected, and that this project seeks to foreground the importance of place when looking at memory, including places that have been specifically constructed for remembrance. What I wanted to explore was the space of overlap between the ideas of phenomenology or embodied experience, psychogeography, and walking, as these theories and methods seemed to have the potential to get me towards how memory and place co-produce each other. Traditional methods and theoretical systems are limited in their capacity to "capture the often incommunicable relationship between a city and its inhabitants" (Coverley 2010, p.25). So to address this I used a mobile app, LiveTrekker, which allows photographic, video, and audio data to be uploaded while walking and linked to the precise place it was taken, creating multi-textured mapped walks. I mapped memorials and the spaces between memorials, connecting them. I mapped during marches, protests and commemorations. I wanted to see whether capturing these multi-dimensions and spatialities somehow produced something that added another dimension, whether there would be new insight produced by reflecting on these mapped walks, and if they could serve as a way to transmit more sensorially how these sites work, how these places feel, how they sound, and how they connect to their context.

Taking a step back, there has been a broad move within geography and other social sciences towards 'mobile methods' part of the so-called 'mobilities turn' (Jones et al. 2008; Rickets Hein et al. 2008), and one method in particular that has developed is the walking interview or 'go-along' (Kusenbach 2003; Anderson 2004; Colls 2004; Hall et al. 2006; Ingold and Vergunst 2008; Jones et al. 2008; Legat 2008; Rickets Hein et al. 2008; Carpiano 2009; Middleton 2009; Fincham et al. 2010; Lashua and Cohen 2010; Evans and Jones 2011). The essential idea of these methods – of talking while walking in various ways – is to examine "a participant's interpretations of their contexts *while experiencing these contexts*" (Carpiano 2009, p.265, emphasis in original). It is a combination of field observation and interview that understands the importance of place to memory and emotion, and is helpful in "exploring the role of

place in everyday lived experience" (Kusenbach 2003, p.463). What the mobilities turn acknowledges is that site and location matters and that "being in motion is somehow different to being stationary, both in terms of the kinds of engagement with the world that it prompts, and the kinds of knowledge and identities that it therefore engenders" (Rickets Hein et al. 2008, p.1268).

Much of the research that has used these methods sits within health geography, studies of spatial dimensions of inequality, and urban planning (Hall et al. 2006; Jones et al. 2008; Carpiano 2009; Dennis et al. 2009; Middleton 2009). Although they take us in an interesting direction, I find the language used and the ways these methods are deployed falls short of their potential. The articulation of a new 'mobilities paradigm' from Mimi Sheller and John Urry in 2006 pushed for radical changes to the way we think things, but analysis of ways we do things still often aspires to fit into a structure of scientific measurability, seen in numerous papers that show us how to 'do' go-alongs by following certain steps, steps which have been tested by a control group of traditional interviews and a group that experienced both (see Rickets Hein et al. 2008). Geraldine Pratt (2000, p.639) argued human geographers have yet "to put much of our theoretical talk into research practices. Our talk may be that of poststructuralists, postcolonialists, or social constructivists, but our practice continues to be that of colonising humanists". Academic norms and expectations limit the creative potential of walking methods, disciplining them to become procedural, measurable, and defendable. I am interested in what kind of research is possible if we transgress these limitations.

There are many exciting elements in these methods that I wanted to develop. On her work with Tlicho communities in Canada, Alice Legat (2008, p.47) comments, "To walk is to pay close and careful attention to one's surroundings while thinking with the multitude of stories one has heard". In the very different context of 'musicscapes', Brett Lashua and Sara Cohen (2010, p.80) recognise that walking tours work well because "the cityscape itself often acts as a prompt or 'memory machine' as we move through the urban environment". Fran Tonkiss (2005, p.128) suggests that the mental maps we carry emerge from our spatial practices and "compose a mishmash of land-marks, personal haunts, good guesses and routine paths...[which are shaped by] the textures of everyday movement in the city". Walking, therefore, is an embodied way

of understanding, experiencing and remembering, mediated by space and place. These approaches formed the basis for the first two empirical chapters of this thesis: Chapter 3 *Memorials to the Disappeared* and Chapter 4 *Memoryscapes*. But a focus on memory and place also underpins the methods I used in the other two areas of work, on participation in arts projects and following relatives of the disappeared.

These ideas are connected to phenomenological (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Hammond et al. 1991; Moran 2000; Dessingué 2011) and psychogeographical (Debord 1995; Coverly 2010; Smith 2010; Bridger 2013) theories. Although prescriptive conceptions of psychogeography exist (outlined in Smith 2010), Alexander Bridger (2013, p.290) focuses on its essence and states, "The aim of psychogeographical research should be to consider peoples' lived relations to places and to use methods of investigation that reveal their immediate, lived experiences of environments". According to Phil Smith (2010, p.104), psychogeography is "the mapping and describing of what would usually be taken for 'subjective' associations and emotions ingrained in the urban structure and texture and their effect upon people in those spaces". The Situationists, a movement associated with psychogeographical practices, were concerned with how environments affect emotion, and walking was a predominant method (Coverly 2010). Mapping lends itself to the "need to examine how physical, social, and mental dimensions of place and space interact within and across time for individuals" (Carpiano 2009, p.264). The mapping I undertook and my explorations of memorials and the city drew on these ideas. I wanted to bring together the nexus of space, movement, emotion, memory, and the environment. They were my journeys and were self-reflexive, but captured different dimensions of what I was experiencing, in photo, video, and space, than written methods would have.

This practice was therefore autoethnographic in nature, but most literature on walking methods assumes walking with participants to capture their narratives. This was originally an aim of this research, but one I was not able to achieve. I wanted to conduct walks or explorations of daily life and neighbourhoods with people searching for their missing relatives. For this to have happened it needed trust and solid relationships, and I soon realised this was never achievable as an outsider in five months. Yet I wanted to explore this (and still one day hope to), because perceptual space is "richly differentiated into places, or centres of special personal significance",

whether actual, imagined, or remembered (Relph 1976, p.11, cited in Kusenbach 2003, p.456). Through exploring a neighbourhood, a home, a community, a city, with and alongside someone, it is my hunch we will learn something more about the co-production of space and memory and the politics of these places. In the context of the Tlicho, Legat (2008, p.46) explains, "Many footprints and trails are only accessible through stories that tell of what has gone before", and Rebecca Solnit (2002, p.6) even suggests "that the mind is also a landscape of sorts and...walking is one way to traverse it".

Researching the sites of memory to violence in Mexico, then, through observation, interviewing, participation, walking, and mapping, provided me with an insight into the landscape of memory (visible and less visible) in these cities. The aim was to go beyond studying memorials through a biography of a site approach or thinking of memorials as palimpsests, as discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis. The autoethnographic practice of reflection and of mapping walks pushed me to think about how it is to experience memory in the city, to move around an environment of memories. The corporeal body is the vehicle through which we sense place and memory, and construct our emotional and affective worlds.

Participating in arts projects

Moving on to the second area of my research, during my time in Mexico I participated regularly in two art-based projects that are responding to violence and disappearance, and constructing social memory. The methodological basis to this participation draws on the ideas just discussed of location and sitedness when interacting (of researching and talking 'in place', if not in motion), ideas of participatory research, and again autoethnography. Specifically, these projects are Bordando por la Paz y la Memoria (Embroidery for Peace and Memory), an embroidery project naming, on handkerchiefs, the victims of the war on drugs, and Huellas de la Memoria (Footprints of Memory), which engraves and prints the soles of shoes belonging to people searching for disappeared relatives. Bordando por la Paz began in Mexico City in 2011, where a group meets weekly to embroider in public space and create this collective public memorial. I embroidered with them almost

every Sunday during my time in Mexico. The project has been taken up by other groups across Mexico and internationally, and developed in several directions as it expanded. I met the artist behind Huellas de la Memoria during my pilot trip to Mexico, and when I returned to Mexico for the longer trip I got more involved, going to the workshop regularly, engraving, printing, and helping with an exhibition of the project. I could not have planned to participate in these projects, this developed naturally with our relationships. However, I was very open to this sort of participation as an embodied way of learning what it meant and felt like to be memorialising the disappeared in this context.

Although not mobile, for these practices I found a lot of relevance in the discussions on walking methodologies for its emphasis on situated research. To spend time embroidering in a group in public space, to chat while engraving and printing in a studio, to meet people in their creative environments, is incredibly rich for the connection between memory and place discussed above. I interviewed the artist behind Huellas de la Memoria only once formally, in their studio, while they worked on a pair of shoes. After that all our conversations were informal, alongside or while working. I never once formally interviewed the embroiderers in Mexico City. This is not because I was unable to – I am certain they would have obliged had I asked – but the only reason I could see to do this was to legitimise my research design. The interview set up would have added nothing to my understanding of the project that embroidering with the group every week gave me. Having an activity to do while 'interviewing' (chatting, discussing) eased any awkwardness felt in a moment's silence. Silence is ok when there is another focus. It is a chance to gather thoughts, and doing something enables conversation to move between speaking about the activity at hand and the context that it is responding to or inspired by. It removes the intensity of question and answer. But place also is important here: "the environment acts as a prompt to discussions" (Jones et al. 2008, p.3). In the plaza we spoke about the years of embroidering there. People approached and responded to the handkerchiefs, they participated themselves. In the workshop we were surrounded by stories, with shelves of shoes telling tales of life with absence.

I also spoke to members of Bordando groups in Monterrey and Puebla in the plazas where they embroidered. These were not walks around an area in the sense implied

with walking or go-along methodologies. Instead these were small tours of plazas, pointing out the micro details of how they used the space: how and where they sat, where they strung *pañuelos* (handkerchiefs) between trees, and how people would interact with them. Sarah Elwood and Deborah Martin (2000, p.649) talk of the 'mircogeographies' of the interview, suggesting, "interview sites and situations are inscribed in the social spaces that we as geographers are seeking to learn more about, and thus have an important role to play in qualitative research". Being in the site had a strong affect on the emotional account of how it *felt*. The embroiderer's memories of specific incidents came back, evoked by the site. This should not be surprising, but it is amazing how often this is overlooked. As James Evans and Phil Jones (2011, p.849) state, "it seems intuitively sensible for researchers to ask interviewees to talk about the places that they are interested in while they are in that place". I am aware, however, of the power of this approach, and that in cases of traumatic experiences this process could trigger negative emotions. Perhaps the reluctance for people to step outside (literally and metaphorically) is a tacit acknowledgment of how powerful it can be. Tom Hall et al. (2006, p.3) suggest in the context of walking, "movement [I would argue certain places] puts the interview at risk; it shifts the balance of control away from the researcher; it exposes the interview to interruption; it ratchets up the ratio of noise to signal".

Recently, there has been an exploration of participatory research in an attempt to redress and balance some of the power relations of the research situation, and recognise both academia and wider society (a strange distinction) as "sites of struggle and knowledge production" (The Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010, p.266). There are many types of participatory research with various motivations to take such an approach (Routledge 1996; Pain 2004; Cameron and Gibson 2005; Chatterton 2006; Kesby 2007; Kindon et al. 2007; mrs kinpaisby 2008; Dennis et al. 2009; Kuhn 2010; The Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010; and Mason 2013). One method most often used is Participatory Action Research (PAR), which seeks to collectively problem-solve. As Wadsworth (1998, cited in Kindon et al. 2007, p.1) explains, "Defined most simply, PAR involves researchers and participants working together to examine a problematic situation or action to change it for the better". I have been instinctively drawn to participatory methods because of its aim to redress power between 'expert' and 'participant'. However, although the dismissal of this distinction

and a commitment to practical outcomes from academic research are to me very welcome, when I began to explore this literature it seemed that in the way PAR is standardised and discussed in academic papers it fell short of challenging that divide. I have read (and listened to) several accounts of participatory research not going as hoped. Natasha Klocker's (2015) honest reflection on her PAR project highlights three issues that challenged her. Namely, her exposure to traumatic narratives, the overwhelming realisation of the possibility that she may actually contribute to structural change, and then the feeling of failing to make a difference after all. She (2015, p.38) described PAR as "an opportunity to work towards culturally sensitive and locally-relevant action and (in the process)...assuage my academic guilt". Her experience shows how effecting change through participation is extremely challenging and often glossed over. However, in addition to how challenging the reality of *doing* these methods is, the way they are written about often still falls into the patterns of academic power relations it was seeking to tear down.

As with walking methodologies, methods such as PAR, participatory appraisal, and solidarity action research are described and applied as methods in an attempt to systematise and make scientific what are messy processes. A paper from The Autonomous Geographies Collective lays out strategies for scholar activism, including participatory research. Quoting Rachel Pain and Sara Kindon (2007, p.2809, cited in 2012, p.249) the Collective state "participatory research is explicitly about the openness, emergence, surprise, tensions, and irreconcilability that often make up the process of coresearching with nonacademics". Not only does this (re)produce the idea of 'non-academic' and therefore a division between the academic and the world to be studied, it also has a tone of naiveté. Jenny Cameron and Katherine Gibson (2005, p.324) described their approach as offering "enabling representations that had the potential to shift selves from dependent and powerless subject positions to capable, active and contributing economic actors", which although tentative, again assumes there is a boundary to transgress between these two subject positions, and that subjects are out there waiting to be empowered. I think what is problematic in these accounts is that they are still orbiting the traditional expectations of scientific research and academia, and not meeting people on their own terms. Perhaps this is unfair, as they are contributing to an academic discussion, but there is a sense of anxiety in trying to go out and help the world, to share expertise,

without sitting back and simply listening, asking how to help, and if, in fact, help is needed.

More critical approaches have been taken by some practitioners of PAR. Mike Kesby (2007) recognises that poststructural theory and participatory approaches may in fact be "inherently antagonistic", in that participation is always already under structures of power. He argues (2007, p.2814), "If we are committed to the philosophy of participation (not just its innovative techniques) we must abandon assumptions about our 'expert' status [and] recognise the expertise and contribution of participants". Pain (2004, p.657) comments, "There is a tendency to assume that power can always be transferred, that academic researchers have this intention and that participants are willing to be empowered in this way". She outlines a long list of various participatory methods, but as far as I can see not one of them suggests the 'researcher' participating in the 'subjects' project, that the academic learn from and join in the response and solution that is already being made. Is it not participatory research this way round?

When we conceive of an academic following a project that is 'out there', created by the community they want to 'study', it is defined as ethnography or observation. Classic ethnography in anthropology is designed to just observe, to be invisible, to not affect the purity and authenticity of the objects of study, and implies there would be no transfer of emotions, knowledge, or ideas. Is there a space between these prescriptive participatory and ethnographic approaches for collaboration? Rigid methodological categorisation and framing is unhelpful in most cases. Here I return to Richa Nagar's work (2014, p.2), who found a similar problematic:

> Consequently, the journeys in and through which the complexities of solidarity and responsibility are felt, known (however, partially), and struggled with, either get relegated to methodological appendices of critical ethnographies or articles on "action" research, or they are dismissed a priori as invalid or unworthy of academic discussion. Such segregated conversations also serve to reinforce the problematic division between "abstract thinking" and "concrete doing".

Nagar explains that collaboration is not always about balancing power, but realising that we all have different types of expertise. A collaborative sensibility can underpin all research methods, and, as Minh-Ha said, can be a way of being in the world.

For me, participating in these projects only when I was invited to do so, through the building of relationships, was the only way to do this research that felt okay, non-exploitative, and also avoided the incredible pressure to create a project that people could participate in, to create a solution to their problems. I worked with people already responding to and challenging the enormous problems in their country and daily lives, and listened to how to support victims, relatives, and survivors. I learned from them. Furthermore, the idea behind participating in these projects was to explore an embodied way of knowing, to understand (partially) how it felt to be working on a memory project in this context. Taking part, using my hands to do the things they were doing, allowed me another way of understanding (partially) what the projects do, how they function. I got to experience them. Practices of autoethnography and reflection helped me to think about what it means to produce memory in some way, to be part of a memorialising process.

Relatives of the disappeared

The third area of my research involved listening to and following relatives of the disappeared as they articulate their demands and undertake their searches. I attended seminars, workshops, public events, protests, consultations in the Mexican Senate, caravans, commemorations, and press events. I spent time with relatives, academics, activists, artists, journalists, and others who were dedicated to supporting and working with relatives in their search. What I wanted to do was listen well, actively, to relatives of the disappeared, to try and have insights into how memory functions in the lives of those directly affected, what it is like to live with absence. I wanted to see if they talked about memory, when disappearance was still so close temporally, and what memory might mean as a concept to them. Where were the most important sites and locations of memory and absence (public memorials, or somewhere else?), and how were these sites and concepts used and articulated politically?

As with the embroiderers and engravers, it seemed very little would be gained from interviewing relatives systematically. Ethically (both by my own judgement and that of my university's ethical procedure) I had to restrict my research to relatives who

were speaking out about their experiences, were already public figures, and for whom speaking to me would not put them in higher risk nor change their daily practices. If I were to interview these people they would tell me the story of their missing relative, of their search, and of their relatives' association. These stories are generally available online as they have been told many times before. Drozdzewski (2015) found that traumatic stories were told to her through facts, dates and events, which somehow seemed less disturbing and traumatic than a personal narrative. This is an understandable coping mechanism:

> For the participant, the method of narration implied some resolution about the macabre events of the past. The determination and potency of the narration, the level of composure must have been part of the participant's process of dealing with their own history and trauma (Drozdzewski 2015, p.33).

Asking for an interview from a relative would only provide an illusion of authenticity and legitimacy to my research design, but I would have taken their energy, emotions, and valuable time. Furthermore, I was not seeking to find out details of the circumstances of disappearances and searches as such, but what happens after the event of disappearance, how life functions with memory and absence. Formal interviews would not have given me insight to this or the political subjectivity of relatives. Instead, I had to listen well to what they were saying and doing over time.

In her research on disappearance in Guatemala in the 1990s, Amy Ross described how, when speaking to relatives, asking certain questions would be enough to convince the person not to respond truthfully as the question itself was foolish in such an insecure context. So, she described (2009, p.180), "Rather than initiating conversations and/or interviews, I listened a lot. I spent years and years with my mouth shut". I listened to roughly one hundred accounts of stories of disappearance in person, but as stories are shared online in documentaries and journalistic pieces I, in fact, listened continuously both before and after my time in Mexico. When chatting to relatives in the spaces where we met our conversations were normal, everyday. I explained who I was and what I was doing, but I did not push my agenda. The project Huellas de la Memoria involved collaboration with relatives of the disappeared for its existence – they chose to donate their shoes and participate. A small group of people began engraving on a regular basis including some relatives who had shoes in the

project. We chatted, while engraving the shoes of other relatives searching for their loved ones, working together on the same project as a community of people who cared about the same issue. Through conversations and through listening well I gained some sense of what memory and the absence they were living with meant to relatives in daily life.

Aditionally, I wanted to know about more private spaces and practices of memory, as this seemed so important but so absent from the majority of academic accounts. However, with such a relatively short time spent in Mexico and with good solid relationships needed to be the basis of this, I did not want to probe deeply into this personal and private area. Instead, I found places where I could read accounts of this, namely, the book *La Presencia de la Ausencia*, written by members of the relatives' association, Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Nuevo León (FUNDENL, United Forces for Our Disappeared in Nuevo León), and other video, photographic, narrative, and journalistic pieces. These accounts go some way to explaining how memory is experienced in everyday life and in intimate spaces. Furthermore, I found, through the stories I listened to, that memory is connected to the search that relatives undertake. Within the search there are sites and material objects of memory – the reconstruction of where the disappeared person had been with maps, actor networks, and phone records, for example – which again would fall outside the boundaries of what would be seen as memory by the academic canon.

My engagement with relatives, therefore, is most probably described as ethnography (with reflexive autoethnography as well); an intense and concentrated listening. But this is not ethnography of the traditional sense, attempting to observe and not affect the group you are interested in, not revealing or sharing yourself. In *Improvising Theory*, Cerwonka and Malkki argue for an ethnographic sensibility, which expresses the intuitive and irreplicable elements of this type of approach. Cerwonka (2007, p.20) argues, "ethnography is not "a methodology" at all in the traditional understanding of the term. It cannot be reduced to a set of standardized techniques that any practitioner can implement". She continues (2007, p.20), "we stress that ethnography demands a certain sensibility, as well as improvised strategies and ethical judgments made within a shifting landscape in which the ethnographer has limited control". Malkki (2007, p.183) comments, "One learns context – and time –

specific knowledge about particular research contexts as one lives and walks in them. And then, in a very direct way, the people with whom one works teach one continually".

The ethical axis that underpins these arguments and the approach I took to fieldwork is summarised by Malkki (2007, p.178): "The broad point here is that anthropological fieldwork is not usually a straightforward matter of working. It is also a matter of living. Ethnographic research practice is a way of being in the world". Cerwonka (2007, p.4) adds, "good social research clearly demands a highly developed, ceaseless, daily engagement with ethics as a process". These gentle methodologies seemed the only appropriate way to conduct this project. But this approach also gave, I believe, better insights into the experience of living with disapearance and what memory means in that context.

(In)security

There is one dimension of this fieldwork that shaped absolutely everything I did and what was possible in some way, and that was working in a context of insecurity. Ross (2009, p.179) questions, "How can one seek safety, when trying specifically to study the absence of security?". She follows (2009, p.186), "Beyond the physicality of violence, security and the lack thereof influence every aspect of our work – the projects we design, the people we interview, the data we collect and the meaning of the product". My experience of this, of trying to work on memorialisation of disappearance in a country where people are disappearing at a rate of thirteen per day (Proceso 2018), where relatives are threatened and murdered for searching, was at times stressful. Aberystwyth University, like all universities, has its ethical and risk assessment procedures, which I found to be completely incompatible with the real risks and complexity of what I was facing. Uniform and generic ethics forms have their definition of vulnerable people framed by mental capacity and age. My research passed ethical approval without trouble as I was working with adults who were all already public in their activism and search for the disappeared. But in this process, I found myself simplifying my concerns with my intended research in Mexico, worried that if I tried to discuss the complexity of these ethical decisions, the approval of my

project would be escalated to an arena that would not have the capacity to listen to nuance. I was silent about all my much subtler concerns, as the space simply did not exist within the procedures (beyond my supervisors) to have a trusting and honest conversation.

The risk assessment was the same, focused on checking the website for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, when hurricane season was, and to be aware when taking public transport. The issues I was worrying about, everyday situations for people I was talking to, included what risk was attached to my clear visibility in Mexico? Would my positionality be protective or increase risk? Would my association with relatives and these wider movements in Mexico increase risk to them in turn or diminish it? Julie Mertus (2009, p.166) warns, "a researcher who overlooks the potential risks of their work and who disregards their own vulnerability may endanger not only their own security but also the security of their interview subjects". Acknowledging that organisations and individuals would be under surveillance (but not really knowing by whom), what would it mean if I frequented an office of a relatives' association? Even if I thought I was not politically aligning myself to an organisation, and simply 'neutrally' researching them, how could I in any way control someone else's perception of me and what I was doing? And how to do all of this in a country where I know, from my research, that state institutions and the police cannot be trusted? Mertus (2009, p.167) acknowledged, "the risk of relying on the state in situations where the state is a serious perpetrator of violence and abuses cannot be overstated".

With these concerns in mind, I was not sure if I should go to Mexico on a tourist visa and risk not being seen as a legitimate researcher or an authority saying I did not have the legal right to be there doing this work. But if I pursued a student visa would I be making myself visible to authorities I did not want attention from, not because I was working illegally, but because of the controversial nature of the subject? It was the same debate about whether I should register with British Embassy or not – all security protocol suggests you should, however doing so makes your presence and research known. Would I want it to be known? Would doing it visibly and overtly protect me or make me a target? What are the ethical implications of doing it covertly, not hidden from the people I was working with, but from the state? But then in turn would this

have an impact on those I was working with? I read academic fieldwork texts and not much could help with the complexity of insecurity I was needing answers for. And I went to NGO fieldwork guides (International Red Cross 1992; International Federation 2009; Overseas Development Institute 2010), which all at least took insecurity seriously but were quite unhelpful for academics researching alone, without the level of institutional support behind them assumed in these guides.

In order to explore these complex risks and make decisions I sought advice from contacts that had experience I could learn from, and decided on the pilot trip/longer trip approach. These included other PhD students who had done similar fieldwork in Mexico, Mexican academics, people who had experience of working with relatives of the disappeared, and risk and security professionals in Mexico. This helped enormously in getting a sense of what was and was not possible, even when advice differed. I went with no academic affiliation in place, but organised this soon after arriving. From the pilot trip I knew it would be easier to arrange in person and I trusted it would happen. An academic working in the field agreed to supervise me and affiliate me to Centro de Investigaciónes y Estudios Superiores en Anthroplogía Social (CIESAS, Centre for Research and Study of Anthropology), which I felt legitimised my research and presence there and gave me access to seminars and other events they were organising. I was vigilant with my data and work traces, keeping my computer and phone clear of any documents related to my PhD. All were saved online and password protected. I never left pages open on my computer, logging out of everything, deleting my browser history regularly. I never wrote names down in my notebook, wrote in a mixture of languages, wrote in bad handwriting and in abbreviations and codes. I deleted all messages from my Mexican phone, and was cautious to not say much about who I was to strangers. On advice from a friend who had done similar research I developed a security protocol that went far beyond anything required of me by Aberystwyth University. Every evening I sent a message to a friend in Mexico City who, if they did not hear from me within half an hour of the fixed time, had instructions to contact certain other friends in Mexico City to see if they knew of my whereabouts. If not they would contact my partner in Wales and my supervisors, and all had each other's emergency contact details including for the British Embassy in Mexico. During my time in Mexico I began with what I deemed as the least risky activities and escalated to the more risky ones towards the end. I

could leave soon after if anything went too far, and it gave me time to assess and understand the situation. I am acknowledging these processes because they are usually erased from accounts of methods, but they influenced my research in Mexico both affectively and practically. Along the lines of feminist standpoint theory, not acknowledging these factors leaves a gap in the subject matter but also reifies the idea of academic research from 'god's view'.

These practices all helped greatly. However, I was also aware before going to Mexico and constantly while there that despite these efforts to rationalise and make sensible decisions from informed advice, in such an insecure context there really is no way to ensure safety or entirely prevent harm. Towards the end of my stay I realised that there were two ways to rationalise my activities and safety in the context of my research. One was that weighing up my positionality it was very unlikely something bad would happen to me. Western foreigners are protected; they do not (usually) disappear, and may be victims of petty crime or theft but generally are in a very privileged position in Mexico, able to leave at any time. But the other way to rationalise was that my understanding of the conflict had reached a point where I knew that violence and disappearance is often random, that it can happen to anyone. So why could it not happen to me? It took me months of being there before I even let the thought that I could be a victim of disappearance pass through my mind, buffered by the sense of being outside of the situation in some way. I believe, in contemporary Mexico, that if you do not accept that violence can happen to people for no reason, that not all victims are criminals, then you do not get close to understanding the conflict, and any analysis from that position will be way off the mark. But once you accept that violence is random, you rationally have to accept it could happen to you. Despite autoethnography being often used to naval gaze, it was autoethnographic reflection that enabled me to learn this, and profoundly shaped my analytical position.

I constantly worried about the traces of my work and myself I was leaving behind. The 8pm daily text messages were a great security measure, but there also was a clear temporal pattern identifiable to anyone following my phone's activities. And the messages often said where I was, what I was doing, and whom I was with. The data security efforts I went to were basic, enough to hide from an amateur but easy to hack for anyone with capacity behind them. I tried not to have too much of a daily routine;

I took different paths through the city, walked different ways through my neighbourhood, and went to different places to work, changing my geographies and trying to be unpredictable, trying not to leave a trace. I realised that I was crafting a huge performance, trying to show to the public world on the street that I was an apolitical unthreatening tourist consuming life or, if a student, one studying something mundane. Many reflexive papers talk about 'performing the researcher' and research being a performance (Latham 1997; Pratt 2000). Like Latham (1997), I also realised I was part of a performance, but mine was about hiding my trace and identity, about not performing the expert. I learned to cope with high levels of anxiety, paranoia, and stress, which eventually wane, but erupt again in panic when someone tries to speak to you in the street or seems to be hanging around outside your apartment. And I had to accept what I could not do, where I could not go, and what I could not ask, for example finding out about murals and street memorialisation in Cuernavaca but being advised absolutely not to go there; being invited to go with relatives digging for mass graves but feeling it was emotionally beyond me; and speaking to activists but not the state about memorials. These things are personal, about sensing, listening and trust, and others cannot replicate them: the impossibility of universal advice and prescriptive methods. In her fieldwork Ross (2009, p.181) observed, "I realize that my sense of security, and that of others, was predicated on my knowing how to observe silence and absences more than engaging in speech". But there is a lot to learn in these performances and silences, the things that cannot be articulated or that will not be found in a formal interview.

Conclusions

I believe that research such as this, on violent and traumatic issues and contexts, cannot be prescribed, steps cannot be followed to reach an end goal, and the end goal cannot be known before starting. It is a step into the unknown, and reliance on (trust in) affective and collaborative methodologies rules out the possibility of a 'robust' research design. In order to listen with open minds and be open to the possibilities of learning contradictory and surprising things, you need to trust in the learning process. This type of research is improvisation, and there are very few methods books on it. I rely on and want to encourage the idea of 'sensibilities': ethnographic,

autoethnographic, phenomenological, collaborative, participatory. In this project I wanted to try and push beyond the normal tropes that memory falls in to, both academically and in practice. I wanted to explore what memorial and broader environments of memory do for those who experience them, what participating in memorialisation projects teaches us and what those objects produced do, and how relatives see the concept of memory daily in their lives and in their searches. To try and reach these (partial) understandings and insights, creative, intuitive, and flexible methodologies were essential. We would not understand things in a new way if we kept doing things in the same way. And above all this research, in this specific context of disappearance in Mexico, was structured by insecurity and by placing ethics at its centre.

Chapter 3: Memorials to the Disappeared

To tell the story of memory and disappearance in Mexico I want to begin with constructed sites of memory: memorials which have been created to mark and make present those missing, memorials that intervene in public space, memorials which become part of, in these cases, urban environments. These are memorials that are inserted into the textures of cities and the lives of those that live there, and the contestations around them tell us something about the struggle for memory of disappearance taking place in Mexico. From this chapter, this thesis will move away from these more typical memorials and find processes of memory with other kinds of spatialities and temporalities. But to begin here explores what is immediately visible, clearly present, to mark and commemorate the disappeared.

In this chapter I begin to map out the memory landscape in Mexico, to demonstrate the locations in which the disappeared are being represented in public space, and also through these memorials, to explore the politics of time and representation underway. In the contemporary Mexican context, to construct a memorial to the victims of the war on drugs – those both disappeared and dead – is indivisible from debate on the responsibility of the state for the violence and demands for justice. Historically, the Mexican state has used absence of information and denial as a tactic in controlling narratives around state violence and impunity, evident in the lack of public discourse around Mexico's dirty war (Flores Solana 2012; Karl 2014a; Calveiro Garrido 2018; López Ovalle 2018). Memory scholar Elizabeth Jelin (2007, p.147) explains how in contexts such as these, the construction of memorials is political in at least two senses: in the conflicts and struggles around their installation and in that they remind us of a conflictive past.

As explained in the introduction to the thesis, underlying this politics of memory is a politics of time. In the linear conception of time that underpins modernity and dominates Western thought, and in turn assumptions about social memory, the past is subordinated to the present and death and life are drawn along these temporal lines. In death we are past, and this temporal separation becomes spatial also, as the past becomes distanced from the present. Those relegated to the past through death have

their political space restricted; in death and in the past they are also somehow fixed, in comparison to those who exist in the present. Therefore, memorials and monuments can be mobilised to push contested events and people into this "dead past" (Bevernage and Aerts 2009, p.405), in an attempt to settle them, depoliticise them, to push them away. The struggles for memory of the disappeared elsewhere, particularly in Argentina and Chile, have navigated how to represent absence whilst paying careful attention to the problem raised by disappearances' ambiguous loss (Boss 1999). That is, how to represent the disappeared without conflating their disappearance with death, without allowing a memorial to close unresolved questions as to their whereabouts, without symbolically ending the struggle for justice by placing those missing in the dead past. The Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina understood the inferior, more marginal status that death would give their disappeared, so they resisted any narratives that conflated the disappeared with the dead, including in memorials (Edkins 2003a; Robben 2005a; Edkins 2006; Bevernage 2008; Bell and Di Paolantonio 2009; Bevernage and Aerts 2009; Hite and Collins 2009; Bevernage and Colaert 2014).

Another aspect of disappearance in Mexico is that the precise location of where the disappearance took place is often unknown, as are the spaces those people may have been taken to and held in. Unlike disappearance in other parts of Latin America, where buildings that functioned as clandestine detention centres have been occupied and turned into memory spaces (Memoria Viva 2018; Proyecto Desaparecidos 2018), in Mexico very few buildings that have been used as spaces of repression and disappearance have been identified (Pineda 2018, p.192). Therefore, memorials to the disappeared tend to not be at the location where the violence took place, with one stand out exception of the Predio La Gallera ranch on the outskirts of Tijuana where 300 bodies were dissolved, which has been recovered and commemorated by the families of disappeared persons (Robledo Silvestre 2014; Délano Alonso and Nienass 2018). Disappearances can take place on streets, highways, and from homes, and these specific locations have been marked by relatives and local communities, but these are not memorials or memory sites constructed to narrate and commemorate to a level of national public discourse, which function to try and place the disappeared in the national social consciousness.

Mexican cities are of course covered with public memorials and sculpture related to the military, independence, and the revolution that narrate Mexican nationalism. Several memorials across Mexico speak to state violence both before and including the war on drugs. Some have been the initiative of the state and others the efforts of victims, survivors, and relatives. In Mexico City these include, amongst others, the memorial and museum at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas to the 1968 Tlatelolco student massacre (Tlatelolco Centro Cultural Universitario 2018), the Museo Memoria y Tolerancia (Museum of Memory and Tolerance; Museo Memoria y Tolerancia 2018), the Estela de Luz (Animal Politico 2013), and the News Divine disco where twelve young people were killed in a police raid (Fuentes 2017). Beyond Mexico City there are many more memorial actions taking place, for example, the Predio La Gallera as mentioned, the Casino Royale in Monterrey where fifty-two people were killed in an arson attack (Regiando 2014), and to the femicide of hundreds of women in the state of Chihuahua over several decades (Mayorga 2018).

In this chapter, however, I will explore four memorials that demonstrate a range of practices that focus on disappearance, and discuss the political struggles at each site. Specifically, I first examine the Memorial a las Víctimas de la Violencia (Memorial to the Victims of the Violence) in Mexico City as the state's attempt to narrate the war on drugs; to place unresolved, unjust deaths and disappearances into the past and provide a veneer of peace and justice. The Memorial is undergoing a process of citizen interventions to name the victims, the crimes, and the perpetrators, adapting the meaning of the site. In contrast to the state's memorial, I then examine three memory sites and memorials that work against the narratives demonstrated at the Memorial a las Víctimas; they resist the relegation of the disappeared to the dead past and create spaces to reinstate the disappeared in public. Namely, these are the Museo Casa de la Memoria Indómita (Museum House of Tireless Memory), a museum and cultural centre built by relatives of the disappeared from the dirty war; the +43 antimonumento (+43 anti-monument), an example of claiming space and challenging impunity in the heart of Mexico City; and the Plaza de los Desaparecidos (Square of the Diappeared) in Monterrey, a public space appropriated by relatives of the disappeared. Across these examples I foreground the spatial, focusing on their geographical context and movement within them, as well as the politics of time. These memorials and sites are located and therefore are in some way static, but they

show the dynamics of how these sites are then lived, how they are always still in process, and should be seen as part of a network rather than distinct sites. Together they begin to map the landscape of visible memorials to recent violence and disappearance in Mexico City and beyond.

Naming the un-named: the Memorial a las Víctimas de la Violencia en México

The Memorial a las Víctimas de la Violencia en México (Memorial to the Victims of the Violence in Mexico) in Mexico City is the federal government's response to the first six years of the war on drugs. In this memorial, therefore, we can gain insight into the approach of the state towards the victims of the war on drugs, how it narrates the conflict, and what politics it is enacting by creating a public monument that acknowledges the extraordinary levels of violence that have existed since 2006. This memorial, then, is a contrast to set the other memorials in this chapter against. But it is also more complex than simply the governments' voice. Within the memorial are dynamics and contestations that reveal a politics of time and of personhood.

President Felipe Calderón commissioned the memorial in 2011, at the end of his presidential term. It was intended to be open in 2012 but plans were abandoned for a year, and it was finally inaugurated with very little warning on 5 April 2013 (Martínez 2013; Rodríguez 2015). The memorial is located adjacent to Mexico City's largest park, Chapultepec, between two of the city's major avenues, Reforma and Periférico, and neighbouring a large military barracks, Campo Militar Marte. The Secretaría de Defensa Nacional (SEDENA, Department of National Defense), the institution responsible for the management of the Army and Air Force, donated the land and soldiers constructed the memorial (Ortiz Struck 2013). Once built, the memorial was handed over to the Comisión Ejecutiva de Atención a Víctimas (CEAV, Executive Commission of Assistance for Victims), a government body that now manages the site.

This is a memorial to victims of a violence that is closely connected to the military. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in fact recognised a large number of homicides, disappearances, and other crimes are committed by state agents, including

the military (Al Hussein 2015). The proximity and presence of the military is felt when visiting the memorial, with soldiers at times visible through the fence and on occasion the sounds of their laughter fill the air. Not only is the memorial located in the shadow of those who many relatives see as, if not the perpetrators, part of the system of repression, but the neighbourhoods of Polanco and Chapultepec it sits within are wealthy and largely protected from the violence (Cebey 2013; Ortiz Struck 2013). Therefore, its location is odd: it is not just disconnected from the lives of those affected by the violence, but seems to be in dialogue instead with the military and the wealthy elite that live in its neighbourhood. The memorial was designed by Mexican firm Gaeta Springall Arquitectos, after a rushed national competition for the project was boycotted by many architects due to the controversies around it (Plataforma Arquitectura 2013; Gaeta et al. 2015; Délano Alonso and Nienass 2018). In the design process consultation with and inclusion of relatives' and victims' associations was limited to a small group of organisations that were connected to the government (Ortiz Struck 2013; González 2016).

I had heard about the Memorial a las Víctimas through friends and colleagues, however searching online before I arrived to Mexico came up with very little. Unlike state-led memorials to traumatic pasts or wars in other countries, this memorial is not designed as a tourist destination; it has no website, no official information, and no map to find it online. Neither is it very present in academic literature on memorials and monuments; it somehow does not fit the memory studies mould. Over the months I spent in Mexico I visited the memorial regularly. On my first visit I went specifically to find it and spend time there, and I mapped the site with the LiveTrekker phone app, registering the design of the site and the narratives it gives of the war on drugs. I went to the site to attend specific events, and I stopped to visit it when I was in the neighbourhood or passing by, to gain a sense of what happened there at different times of day, on different days of the week, across several months. I walked around the site and I walked to the site and located it within a much wider context within the city. Over all these visits I saw just a handful of people passing through the memorial, none paid attention to it and none seemed to be there for the purpose of a visit. The only people consistently present are the three to five security guards who roam the site, and on occasion street sweepers cleaning it.

The 15,000 meter square site is an open park-like space and can be entered on three sides, and the fourth is the military barracks. The memorial consists of seventy steel monoliths set amongst trees, some wider than tall, and others narrow at the base reaching towards the sky (Gaeta et al. 2015). The steel is an oxidised red, and at the entrance to the site the monoliths are low, long, and spaced out, which build up to the centre of the site where they are close together and tall, with walkways and water between them on the ground (Figures 1 and 2). As visitors pass through the memorial, they are presented with quotes engraved into the monoliths from international literary and political figures such as Isabel Allende, Octavio Paz, Edmund Burke, George Bernard Shaw, Martin Luther King, and others. The very first monolith at the entrance to the memorial takes a quote from Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes, which says, "How unjust, what a curse, what a bastard is death that does not kill us but those we love". The next monolith, a little further into the park, then has the title, 'Memorial a las Víctimas de la Violencia en Mexico' and an introduction to the memorial, which states:

> Here begins the tribute that Mexicans have made for our loved ones who have been victims of crime. We remember them with affection and they will always live in our memory and our hearts. We would be grateful if visits to this memorial are made respectfully, reflecting on how much society and governments have to do in order to stop criminal violence and build a Mexico of peace, freedom and justice. We hope that the eternal memory of our victims will be the hope that drives us to fight for a better Mexico. 2012. (Memorial a las Víctimas de la Violencia 2015a).

These first two inscriptions set the tone and message the memorial intends. The introduction places the violence since 2006 within a discourse of delinquency and crime, rather than recognising the role of the state and particularly the military in the violence that has taken place since the instigation of the war on drugs. It celebrates the government in dealing with the problem of organised crime and instructs us on how to feel and behave while visiting the site, asking visitors to be complicit in this narrative of the war on drugs, and locating the memorial as 'our' response, a memorial on behalf of us all.

Figure 1: Memorial a las Víctimas de la Violencia en México.

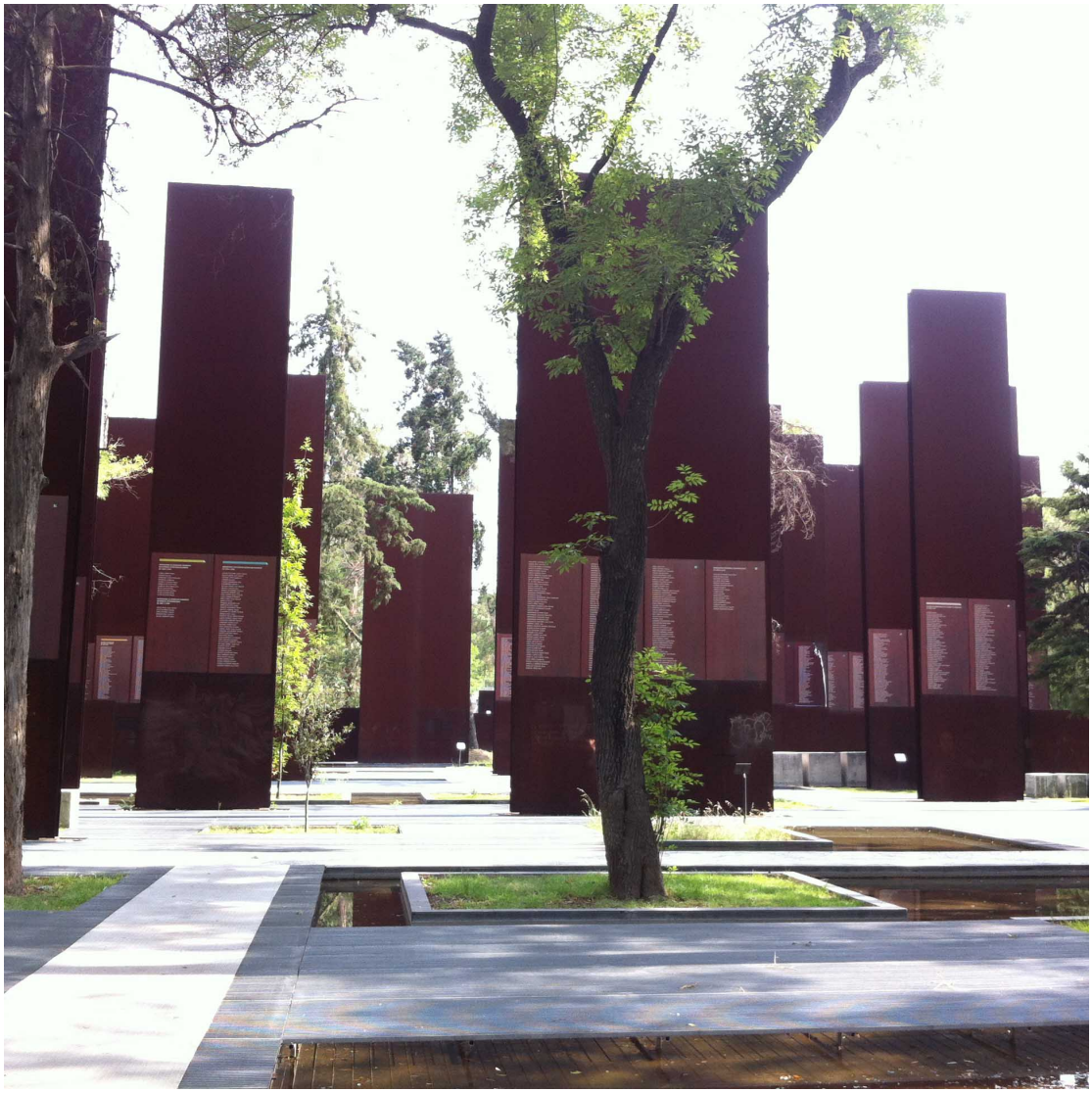

Figure 2: Memorial a las Víctimas de la Violencia en México.

Placing memorials and monuments in public space engages in a politics of memory. Memorials can be designed to create a space where contestation and interpretation is welcomed or they can attempt to set a version of events in stone. One outcome of creating memorials, however, can be that their fixedness in their narrative and in public space can in fact enable collective forgetting (Young 1992). Developing his idea of counter-monuments, James Young (1992, p.272-273) argues, "monuments may not remember events so much as bury them altogether beneath layers of national myths and explanations....For once we assign monumental form to memory, we have to some degree divested ourselves of the obligation to remember". This capacity for monuments and memory work to close off discussion can be an intended consequence of memory work and, as Young (1992, p.273) observed in regards to Germany, "in

effect, the initial impulse to memorialize events like the Holocaust may actually spring from an opposite and equal desire to forget them". The Memorial a las Víctimas can be seen through the lens of what Katherine Hite and Cath Collins (2009, p.383) describe as the "funerary function" of memorials; it was designed and constructed to put to rest thousands of unexplained and unjust deaths, for them to be forgotten through the monumental form. And these questions essentially draw from a politics of time. The victims of violence this memorial commemorates are now meant to be located in the past, the collateral damage of some unfortunate but past event, where, now conflated with the dead, those victims and their relatives should be silent and society should move on.

Beyond a domestic politics of memory and time, the memorial is also speaking for the Mexican state to the international community. Exploring Holocaust tourism, Andrew Gross (2006, p.76) argues that "an internationally recognizable memorial architecture seems to be emerging, one emphasizing gaps, voids, incongruities and the personal relation to what theorists and commentators have begun to call 'negative' or 'evil sublime'". These aesthetics place memorials within an international human rights and transitional justice paradigm, with the assumption that acknowledgment of state perpetrated violence in public space can be a form of reparation and enable societal reconciliation, as well as implying justice and peace (Jansen 2013; Bevernage 2014; Bevernage and Colaert 2014; Bevernage 2015; David 2017). The Memorial a las Víctimas includes several of these signifiers of contemporary memorials to trauma and violence, recognisable within what has become an international aesthetic (Clark, L. B. 2010). The quotes from writers and politicians across the monoliths imply an acknowledgement of the crime and that justice and peace have prevailed; the modernist architecture and landscaping plays with dimensions of space and emotion to instigate reflection and calm. The architects of the memorial explain their design:

> Walking through the site a central space emerges, a 1,200 meter squared mirror of water [a pond] open in its geometry, to reflect the theme of violence in Mexico, which is also open. Water represents cleanliness, clarity, purification: topics and concepts necessary for pacification. The water, in turn, reflects, duplicates, and strengthens the vertical walls, and reflects the sky taking us upward in a dialogue

> between earth and water, between suffering and hope (Gaeta et al. 2015).

These monoliths and the weaving path between them have visual parallels to the Parque de la Memoria in Buenos Aires, Argentina (Parque de la Memoria 2018), the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, Germany (Stiftung Denkmal 2018), and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C., the United States (National Parks Service 2018). All are based on large walls which direct movement through a park space. It is not, however, these aesthetics as such that are problematic at the Memorial a las Víctimas, but what using these design tropes signifies to the world: that the government is acknowledging its involvement in violence and that there is now justice and peace. The construction of the memorial enables the Mexican state to demonstrate to the international community that it acknowledges and condemns the violence of the war on drugs, performing what has come to be the appropriate state response to mass trauma or violence. This is not uncommon, as Katherine Hite (2012, p.2) explains: "Traditionally states have attempted to commemorate the past while projecting unity, peace, and purpose, often in the aftermath of atrocious violence in which states are deeply implicated". Yet although the memorial draws on many of the aesthetics that signify the international human rights paradigm, it lacks one very common design feature: names.

Since the construction of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, walls of names have become the "de rigueur" for trauma memorials (Clark, L. B. 2010, p.69). However, the Memorial a las Víctimas was designed absent of information about who the victims it is honouring are and what crimes they were victims of. Aside from the quotes from international figures already mentioned, the memorial was bare: the victims' names, the atrocities they suffered, whether they were killed or disappeared, and who the perpetrators were, was all absent. There was no sense of the personal. During the inauguration of the memorial in April 2013 Alejandro Martí, President of the civil association México SOS, who had been working with the government on the memorial, explained:

> This memorial has no names because there is no official list [of victims]. For this reason the sheets [monoliths] are blank, so that people can write names here. And this memorial not only remembers

> those who have parted, but also those of us who are still here (quoted in Martínez 2013).

Architect Arturo Ortiz Struck (2013 no page) reflected on the significance of this, stating, "The memorial to the victims of violence built in Chapultepec, beyond its architectural quality, is a construction that feels more like an empty and premature tomb for the disappeared, than a space of reflection".

Yet, the Memorial to the Victims of Violence has not remained as it was when it was inaugurated: there are two interventions taking place on the monoliths themselves, adding other narratives to the site. The first is the addition of words, messages, and drawings in chalk on the monoliths. On my first visit to the Memorial I was approached by one of the security guards who keep a constant watch. He explained that I was welcome to draw on the monoliths and offered me chalk to do so, and said that groups and other visitors had added those around us. The chalk interventions vary in tone and subject; some comments around us were apolitical and did not acknowledge the victims, such as, "Do what really makes you most happy! Most important is to be happy and enjoy life", whereas others addressed state crimes: "The eyes of Mexico are on the 43. We want justice", referencing the enforced disappearance of the Ayotzinapa students (Figure 3). Allowing the public to intervene in the memorial suggests it is an open space of dialogue, aligning it with counter-monuments and the human rights paradigm mentioned. The reality of these chalk interventions, however, is that they are invited in a space where speech is not entirely free. Alejandra Délano Alonso and Ben Nienass (2018) explain that the chalk comments are filtered by CEAV, the managers of the site, who remove those they deem as offensive. Counter-monument practices that were originally a way of acknowledging state crimes, in this context, have been sucked into the machine of impunity.

Figure 3: Chalk interventions on the monoliths at the Memorial a las Víctimas de la Violencia.

The second intervention in the memorial is the placing of lists of names of victims onto the monoliths, naming the dead, the disappeared, and state atrocities (visible in Figures 1 and 2). This intervention is organised by Comité 68 ProLibertades Democráticas (1968 Committee for Democratic Freedoms). Comité 68 was founded in 1988 by Raúl Álvarez Garín, a leader of the 1968 student movement and survivor of the Tlatelolco and Corpus Christi massacres (Poniatowska 1991; Doyle 2003; Gonzáles 2016). The Comité work to commemorate and keep alive the memory of these massacres and other incidents of state repression in Mexico. At the office of Comité 68 I spoke to Dulce González, who coordinates their interventions in the memorial. They have been placing these lists on the memorial since 2013, and by the

spring of 2016 when I visited there were 7,978 names present, as well as the locations and dates of state-committed massacres. The adding of names is an attempt to appropriate the site for the victims, survivors, and their relatives (Gonzáles 2016).

A few meters into the memorial, beyond its official introductory text, Comité 68 have placed their own introduction to the site on a monolith, which they have named the Memorial *de* Víctimas de la Violencia *del Estado* (Memorial *for* the Victims of the *State* Violence, emphasis mine). The passage is long, but the quotation below is emblematic:

> The names we have begun to place on the structures of the Memorial for the Victims of Violence are just a very small number of the crimes committed by the Mexican state, through direct or indirect action, by complicity, negligence, and corruption (Memorial a las Víctimas de la Violencia 2015b).

The narrative of Comité 68 is juxtaposed to that of the state. Theirs is an accusation that clearly names who they see as the perpetrator of the violence, and asks visitors to think about violence in a systemic way, as well as to know who the victims are. Furthermore, the lists they have stuck to the monoliths distinguish different aspects of violence, such as disappearance, murder, and femicide. Some lists name the victims of a specific massacre or crime, such as the disappearance of the Ayotzinapa students, and others cover a broader issue over a certain period of time, for example, victims of femicide in the state of Chihuahua between 1993 and 2013. Comité 68 do not restrict the memorial to victims of state violence within the war on drugs, for example, they list the Tlatelolco student massacre in 1968, and the massacre in Acteal, Chiapas in 1997 (Gutiérrez 2004).

On the 5 March 2016 I attended an intervention at the memorial organised by Comité 68 and other organisations, to add names to the site (Comité 68 2016). Five new lists of names were inaugurated that afternoon, three of which addressed *juvenicidios*, a term which has recently come to be used in Mexico to describe the social conditions and structures that place young people in extremely precarious positions, which can result in loss of life (Valenzuela 2015). These were the massacres at the nightclub News Divine in Mexico City (Délano Alonso and Nienass 2018), at Villas de Salvárcar in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua (Hernández 2012b), and in Creel, Chihuahua

(teleSUR 2018). The other two lists named the victims of the Casino Royale fire in Monterrey, Nuevo León (Regiando 2014), and the fifteen journalists who had, to that date, been murdered in the state of Veracruz during the governorship of Javier Duarte de Ochoa (Ávila 2018). When I arrived at the entrance of the memorial, at least fifteen armed police (I believe they were most likely *granaderos*, military police) greeted those who attended. Dulce later explained this was the first time they had been present at one of Comité 68's interventions (González 2016). Around fifty people had gathered in the centre of the memorial and a table with banners and microphones was ready for a press conference, which shortly took place. Relatives of people whose names would be added that day were carrying red and white flowers and photos of the victims. At the table representatives from Comité 68 and relatives addressed the press and other attendees, explaining the event that day and the work of intervening in the memorial. The names of each victim being added that day were called, and the response of *presente* (present) followed each name.

Comité 68's introduction to the memorial acknowledges that their method is not exhaustive. Dulce explained to me the process by which they began naming the victims: first listing massacres that they knew of, and then working with regional human rights and relatives' organisations outside of Mexico City to source names of victims, with their consent and collaboration. However, she explained, "Unfortunately the rate of victims increases faster than we can put names up" (Gonzáles 2016). Yet not all relative and activist organisations have supported the interventions of Comité 68. Some see their actions as legitimising the space, which, as Délano Alonso and Nienass (2018) demonstrate, is how the memorial's architects interpret the interventions. They argue the memorial's design invites intervention and the monoliths were left blank purposefully so as not to limit the memorial to certain victims in the absence of data. To some, therefore, Comité 68's actions allow the state to say the memorial is functioning as intended.

However, as with the chalk interventions, there are limits to what will be permitted with these lists. On my first visits to the site Comité 68 had at some point previously placed their amended name for the memorial – for the victims of *state* violence – on several monoliths. These small stickers placed high on the monoliths had not been removed, but black spray paint had covered the word 'state' on each (Figure 4). The

memorial's security guards told Comité 68 that the stickers were defaced during the night; that it was not done by the CEAV. However, Comité 68 doubt this account as the stickers were difficult to reach and there are five security guards on site twenty-four hours a day (González 2016). On the day that I attended the inauguration of the five new lists of names, I saw a large sticker had been placed across the length of one monolith near the entrance, naming the site the Memorial for the Victims of State Violence in a bold and highly visible form. It was installed the day before the event (González 2016), but on my next visit some weeks later it had been removed. The line that cannot be crossed at the memorial is visible in this censorship; naming the victims they can allow, but naming the perpetrator goes too far.

Figure 4: The word 'Estado' removed from stickers placed by Comité 68 at the Memorial a las Víctimas de la Violencia.

The Memorial to the Victims of Violence is maintained and funded, yet empty – of meaning, victims, and visitors. It creates the appearance of a space for reflection and remembrance by utilising common aesthetics for trauma memorials, but visitors are not meant to stay long nor ask any questions. It is not a space of education, for finding

out what has happened, to whom, when, where, and by whom. Its construction plays into a politics of time and space where the past is depolitcised, distanced, and voiceless. It is an attempt to force closure and move on. If the dead and disappeared can be pushed into the past, through the construction of a memorial to them, then contestations as to the nature of their deaths and disappearances can be buried. The absence of names on the memorial, although justified by the lack of information on who the victims are, serves to leave them without identity, without personhood. The dead and disappeared are anonymous, and from this position their political capacity is diminished. The interventions of Comité 68 do not transform the site but rather add another narrative to it, one that can both be interpreted as a denunciation of the state and an appropriation of the space, but also as a legitimisation of the memorial. Their interventions do not erase or replace the original actions and intentions of the state. Nonetheless the interventions are an attempt at restoring some detail – to name the victims and, importantly the perpetrator, to reinstate identity and context to the victims.

Exploring the Memorial to the Victims of Violence at this point, as the first example of memory work in the first substantive chapter of the thesis, demonstrates the context of the politics of memory to the disappeared unfolding in public space in Mexico. I want to set the other types of interventions that are taking place across Mexico City and beyond against this memorial. This will be the only space for the state narrative in this thesis. In the rest of this chapter I look at markers in public space that are constructing a memory of disappearance from a variety of actors that tell different stories and perspectives, but which all, crucially, are fighting to locate the disappeared in the present present (resisting the dead past) and which represent the identities of the missing. These memorials are the Museo Casa de la Memoria Indómita, a space of education and community; the +43 antimonumento that places the disappeared in the centre of the city and challenges impunity; and the Plaza de los Desaparecidos, a space where the disappeared are represented and where life continues in the centre of Monterrey. These memorials are circumventing a politics of time that relegates the disappeared to an inferior depoliticised past, and focus on the human, the person, and making them present in various ways.

Knowing people: the Museo Casa de la Memoria Indómita

I want to turn now to the first of the three memorials to the disappeared that this chapter examines, namely, the Museo Casa de la Memoria Indómita (Museum House of Tireless Memory), in the centre of Mexico City. The Museo Casa is a first stepping-stone into the landscape of memorials to the disappeared in Mexico, as it is the only museum dedicated to the disappeared, and it focuses on the disappearances of the dirty war and therefore is more established in its sense of the struggle for memory. Within the Museo Casa, in contrast to the Memorial a las Víctimas de la Violencia, a visitor comes into contact with the disappeared and their families, as well as a narrative that contextualises disappearance as a tactic of state repression in Mexico. Opened by a relatives' association, the Museo Casa is the most recent stage in their search for their disappeared and for justice, and is a conscious attempt to place the disappeared in social memory and history, through constructing a public space of knowledge and education.

The Museo Casa was founded by Comité ¡Eureka!, an association of relatives of people who disappeared during Mexico's dirty war from 1968 to the early 1980s (Karl 2014a; Pineda 2018), with the support of H.I.J.O.S. México, an association of children of the disappeared (H.I.J.O.S. México 2018). Located in the historic centre of Mexico City in an old building donated by the city government, the Museo Casa opened in 2012 with the aim of preserving memory of a struggle that has been historically erased from public space (Karl 2014a; Gálvez 2016; desInformémonos 2017). Like most museums in Mexico, the Museo Casa is closed on Mondays, which is when I first saw the building from the street. A large photograph from the 1970s of the members of Comité ¡Eureka! covers the closed shutters, and the awnings above each window on the building demand *vivos los llevaron, vivos los queremos* (alive they took them, alive we want them back). When I returned later that week the tree outside the building in the pedestrianised Calle Régina was adorned with small photographic portraits of the forty-three Ayotzinapa students, and forty-three chairs with the same portraits resting on them had been arranged in the street, connecting disappearances of the dirty war to contemporary cases. The entrance to the Museo Casa is a little unexpected; instead of an obvious doorway there is a café open onto the street, through which you enter the museum. The café, which at first seems like

the many other places to eat lunch that spill out onto this street every day, is part of an internal courtyard surrounded by offices and rooms for events, with the permanent exhibition upstairs. The Museo Casa is also a cultural centre: in their event spaces, courtyard and café they hold book launches, film screenings, discussions, live music, and artisanal market days, which bring people into the space and create a dynamism not associated with traditional museums.

Climbing the stairs to the balcony that overlooks the courtyard, visitors are greeted with a large mural of a mother hugging the shadow of a child, which blends into flying birds. The mural, named Abrazo Ausente (Absent Embrace) was painted by Oaxacan art collective Lapiztola (a play on the words *la pistola* (the pistol) and *el lapiz* (pen/pencil); Lapiztola 2018), and represents the desire of the family to hug the disappeared once again (Gálvez 2016; Figure 5). As visitors walk through the rooms and displays the exhibition has a chronological narrative, beginning the story of disappearance and state violence in Mexico with the 1968 Tlatelolco and the 1971 Corpus Christi student massacres (Poniatowska 1991; Doyle 2003), following with how life continued alongside and ignoring state repression. In the next room visitors are confronted by the testimonies of victims of torture at the hands of state actors, which is then, in an adjacent room, connected to other historical periods of state perpetrated human rights violations in Latin America.

Figure 5: Abrazo Ausente mural by Lapiztola at the Museo Casa de la Memoria Indómita, Mexico City.

The next section of the exhibition focuses on the disappeared themselves. The Sala de Espera (Room of Hope) is decorated like the living room of a home, with armchairs, a coffee table, and other everyday objects, some of which came from the homes of the *Doñas* (Mothers) of Comité ¡Eureka! (Pineda 2018). Adorning the walls and placed on top of dressers and furniture are hundreds of framed portraits of the missing, while their books and records, which they were reading and listening to around the time of their disappearance and which influenced them ideologically, fill the bookshelves (Pineda 2018; Figure 6). After telling the stories of the disappeared, this follows on to a room that focuses on Comité ¡Eureka! and H.I.J.O.S. México, which is filled with banners and posters from decades of protests and actions in their struggle for justice. The permanent exhibition contextualises disappearance socially and geographically within Latin America and the ideologies of the Cold War, but also places it within the context of the home, the family, the personal. But it does not explore or attempt to explain contemporary disappearances and the complexity of what is taking place currently in the war on drugs. The final room is a temporary exhibition space that

changes every few months, which on the first visit I made displayed photographs from street demonstrations against the disappearance of the Ayotzinapa students. However, the Ayotzinapa case is unusual in contemporary disappearance in how the public has responded to it, and many people have framed the case within the ideology that fuelled the dirty war. Exhibiting Ayotzinapa in this room, then, remained in continuity within the permanent exhibition.

Figure 6: The Sala de Espera in the Museo Casa de la Memoria Indómita, Mexico City. Photo credit: Mijael Jiménez, reproduced with his permission.

Comité ¡Eureka! reached a point when they needed to create a space to hold and host their story, as forty years had passed since the disappearance of their relatives and the original members of the association were passing away. The *Doñas* are old women now, and are aware of the politics of memory and time. On my first visit to the Museo Casa in November 2015 I spoke to Jorge Gálvez, a member of Comité ¡Eureka! and the Director of the Museo Casa. I returned several times to eat in the cafe or attend events, and sat down with Jorge again in March 2016 to talk more about the space.

Comité ¡Eureka! needed to place themselves in history in some way. Jorge (Gálvez 2016) explained,

> creating a museum wasn't in our plans, we didn't aim for this. We believed that justice was going to come…. We don't call it a project, as if it was all something we planned, no. It's part of the ongoing struggle, and it has a lot to do with memory.

The members of Comité ¡Eureka! and H.I.J.O.S. México recognise that social, collective, public memory is established through markers and that they needed the Museo Casa to represent them.

The creation of the Museo Casa, then, grounds the story of Comité ¡Eureka!'s struggle in bricks and mortar; it is housed, and it enables them to educate the public so the memory of their disappeared continues. In terms of public awareness, the Museo Casa is still relatively marginal; it is not a tourist destination, it does not compete with the major museums in Mexico City, and it is not a space everyone in the city knows of. But part of claiming a place in social memory and history is locating it in space, and they now have a base – a public one – that provides a location for their struggle in the centre of the capital city. 'History' is in archives and museums. These spaces are powerful. And in this sense the Museo Casa is a museum; it is a space for education and preservation, and it legitimises their narrative of the dirty war. Over the years Comité ¡Eureka! have amassed a large archive that documents their searches and struggle, and they are working with staff from the Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México (UACM, Autonomous University of Mexico City) to digitise and make this archive public (Gálvez 2016; Pineda 2018, p.198). Visitors to the Museum are approached by volunteers who engage them in conversation about the exhibition, the issue of disappearance, and the work of the Comité. School and other groups of young people come for tours. For Jorge, there is value in having these interactions in person, so he can share his family's experience in a face-to-face encounter. He explains, "When you speak to someone, learn their personal story, you see they aren't 'radical' or 'communists' – that this state crime could happen to you" (Gálvez 2016). It is the personalisation of this story that has impact. In these efforts they are working to create postmemory (Hirsch 2011); they want the next generation to know that their relatives are still disappeared. It is in this sense the Comité use *indómita* (indomitable, tireless, stubborn): "this memory is indomitable because we are going to say to our

children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren what the motivations and struggles of their distant relatives were" (Gálvez 2016).

As well as a museum, the Museo Casa is also a *casa*, a home. Though not necessarily noticeable to a visitor, every detail of the experience of being there connects you to those absent and their families. As mentioned, in the permanent exhibition the furniture and objects have come from their homes and on the wall in the courtyard are framed portraits of the original members of Comité ¡Eureka! (Figure 7). The café serves the meals the missing relatives liked to eat, and the Comité have asked the kitchen staff to imagine they are cooking for the disappeared themselves. The café plays music the disappeared used to listen to (Gálvez 2016); other senses are connected to the memory of the disappeared, beyond the visual:

> our only weapon is memory. And we've said this for years. For us it's important to rescue the activities that our disappeared relatives were doing, their names, where they lived, what joys they had in life, what they listened to, what smells they liked, what food they enjoyed, all of these things are memory no? Not only the tangible things (Gálvez 2016).

Although the Sala de Espera in the exhibition represents absence in the home, this room, along with the café and cultural space which has been created downstairs, represent to me the meaning of the Museo Casa: the absence of loved ones in the centre of lives, in the home, but also the creation of another home, another family, another community. The Museo Casa is now a space outside the privacy of home for the relatives of Comité ¡Eureka! and the broader public to come together and know those missing; to learn about the struggle for justice but also to learn about the disappeared and their families as people.

Figure 7: Portraits of the *Doñas* of Comité ¡Eureka! at the Museo Casa de la Memoria Indómita, Mexico City.

The Museo Casa de la Memoria Indómita occupies a distinct space on the memory landscape in Mexico in relation to the disappeared, in that it is a museum and educational space, in a context of denial and erasure of these crimes. It consciously draws on the ideas and assumptions the status of 'museum' brings to a struggle that has fought for recognition for forty years. Yet at the same time it is dynamic and open, a cultural centre and a café, a hub for their community – both in the neighbourhood and those with a politics that aligns with their struggle. In contrast to the Memorial a las Víctimas de la Violencia, the Museo Casa teaches disappearance as a state violence that has continuity from the late 1960s until the present, and it seeks to educate, to inform, and to debate. While holding this political and educational aim central, the Museo Casa also maintains a strong sense of the personal. It represents through subtle means the people who are disappeared, and who their families are, who have come together to search for four decades.

Defying impunity: the +43 Antimonumento

I now want to turn to the next memorial, which contrasts and complements what has already been explored in mapping the landscape of memorials to the disappeared. The +43 antimonumento (+43 anti-monument) claims public space and, in its presence and location, challenges the impunity of the disappearance of the Ayotzinapa students and other disappeared persons.

On the 26 April 2015, the seven-month anniversary of the disappearance of the forty-three Ayotzinapa students, their relatives and allies constructed an anti-monument in the centre of Mexico City. The anti-monument is an imposing '+' sign and the numbers '43', reaching around ten feet tall and coloured bright red, and was erected in the Glorieta del Caballito on Avenida Reforma, the same avenue as the Memorial a las Víctimas de la Violencia, but in a more central site. The anti-monument is big and bold, claiming public space for the memory of not just the forty-three but the '+' encapsulates the students and bystanders that were killed that night and Mexico's 37,000 other *desaparecidos* (Figure 8). The antimonumento was installed without seeking permission, and was part of the monthly protest march that has been taking place since the students were disappeared. Relatives of the students and supporters dug a deep hole to put a base for the sculpture into, and then quickly pushed the three pieces into place collectively: a literal construction of memory in public space. They then planted seedlings in the surrounding earth and commemorated the antimonumento by displaying images of forty-three and with music, poetry, and performance (Olivares Alonso 2015). In the speeches that followed it was explained that the antimonumento is a reminder to people who pass by that there is still no truth, justice, or punishment of those responsible, and that they demand the authorities not to remove it until the students re-appear, alive (Olivares Alonso 2015).

Figure 8: The +43 antimonumento on Avenida Reforma, Mexico City.

I learned of the +43 antimonumento through social media when it was installed, and one of the first things I did on arrival to Mexico City was visit it. Life in the centre of Mexico City takes you frequently past the antimonumento on foot, car, and bus, and I became accustomed to seeing it, claiming its space and speaking for the disappeared. I saw commuters pile up next to it when crossing the road, and tourists wander past it without really noticing, distracted by the city around them. I was in a crowd that swarmed around it for a concert on *Dia de los Muertos*. I was able to look down on it from a friend's office and see it in its context from above, and watch the hum and flow of pedestrians and traffic pass by (Figure 9). Its precise location is a piece of land that divides the directions of traffic on Avenida Reforma. It is accessed by a pedestrian crossing so people gather in front of it in the middle of the road as they wait for the next light to turn green. On the small plinth at the base of the +43 are the words *¡PORQUE VIVOS SE LOS LLEVARON, VIVOS LOS QUEREMOS!*, as on the awning of the Museo Casa. And on my first visit in November 2015 the *milpa* – maize, a symbol of rural and indigenous identity in southern Mexico, precisely the community

the Ayotzinapa students come from – that had been planted by the relatives and their supporters when it was constructed, had grown tall (Figure 9).

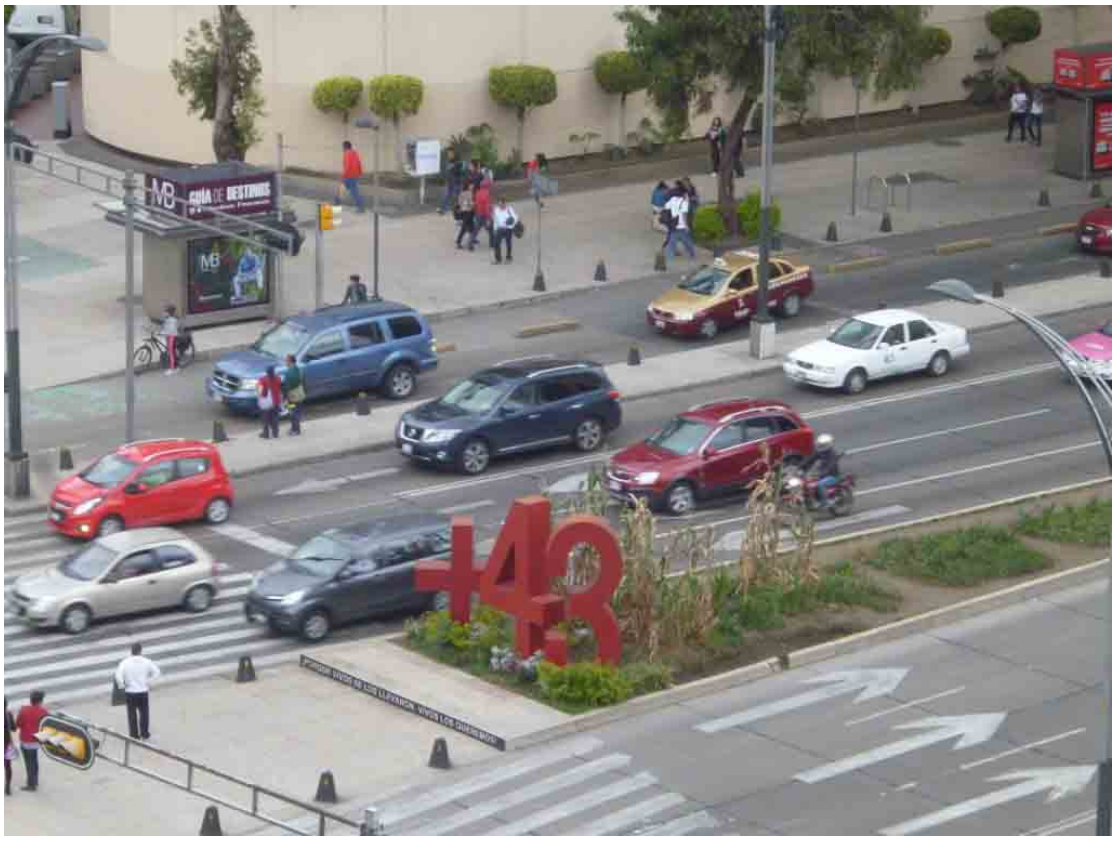

Figure 9: The +43 antimonumento on Avenida Reforma, Mexico City, from above.

The communication published online by the coordinators of the antimonumento explained they used the word anti-monument "Because it is an act of transgression and a claim against a state that wants to forget" (NAR 2015). They continue:

> the project +43 is the construction of an 'anti-monument' because it does not aspire to perpetuate memory but to alter the perception of this event [the disappearance of the 43] as fact. +43 can be defined as a permanent protest and a demand for justice from the state in public space. +43 aims to call attention from passersby who cross through the area daily (NAR 2015).

The antimonumento was constructed in the wake of the so called "historic truth" about Ayotzinapa, declared by the Attorney General of Mexico, claiming the students were dead (OHCHR 2018a, p.2). Therefore, constructing a monument akin to the many other installations of public art and commemorations that fill the streets of

Mexico City, that represent and narrate nationhood (Anderson 1983; Billig 1995), gives a grounding, a placing, a locating, and a sense of permanence to those absent; they are there, represented. This draws parallels with the Museo Casa, although in a much more informal and radical claiming of space and denouncing of impunity.

Literature on counter-monuments draws on James Young's explorations of memory work in Germany. He describes counter-monuments as "flaunting memorial conventions", that they are generally designed to challenge and question memorial design which seeks to fix a narrative in stone and history, memorials that seek permanence, or something like it (Young 1992, p.276). However, some traits of counter-monuments Young identifies are not applicable in the case of the antimonumento, such as that they are "not to remain fixed but to change; not to be everlasting but to disappear" (1992, p.276). With the +43 antimonumento its political power lies in its solidity, standing strong against impunity. The +43 antimonumento challenges the state's narrative and its attempts to close the case and place it in the dead past. The antimonumento will be there until the disappeared return.

The politics of time, in regards to memory and disappearance, is clear in the case of the forty-three, where the moves and mechanisms of the state to place the disappeared into the dead past rather than in the liminal and continuous present are clear and visible. The antimonumento is locating the disappeared in the present present, by placing the disappeared amongst us in our environment, reminding, demanding, and questioning. In this sense it draws comparison with other interventions around disappearance in Latin America, namely in Argentina, the silhouettes brought into the streets of Buenos Aires to protest the government at the end of the last dictatorship (Longoni and Bruzzone 2005) and the *bicis* – bicycle stencils – in Rosario that mark the location on a street where someone was taken (Hite 2012). Yet the antimonumento simultaneously seems a part of and stands out from the landscape. It has neither become part of the landscape and is therefore banal or quiet or unnoticed, nor does it aggressively disrupt. It is simply bringing those absent into the life and landscape of the heart of the city, into our daily lives.

Beyond the micro-geographies of the site and the movement of people around it, the wider location of the +43 is also part of the way it challenges and defies impunity.

Among the buildings surrounding the antimonumento are the offices of El Universal and Excélsior, two national newspapers, the latter of which declares above its doors to be "la esquina de la información": the information corner. These companies are part of the structures that construct and reproduce the "historic truth" in the case of Ayotzinapa, and more broadly the dominant narratives of the war on drugs and violence. The claiming of space for the +43 in front of these offices and alongside other public art and sculpture, questions these buildings and statues. It asks us to recognise public sculpture and monuments in their narrative capacities, and question the institutions that narrate the war on drugs. Adjacent to these, the antimonumento is a reminder of the absence society is living around, the awkward hole that is being skirted.

In advance of the one-year anniversary of the installation of the antimonunmento, on the 23 April 2016 a group of relatives and others went to the +43 to carry out maintenance. I went along that day and a group of around twenty-five people had gathered on the middle of the pedestrian crossing. Some were holding signs communicating the continued absence of the forty-three students to the passing traffic, others had placed forty-three pairs of shoes on the ground where pedestrians passed by, others were re-painting the antimonumento, and others still were working on the small piece of land behind, replanting the *milpa* and adding gardenias and forget-me-nots (+43 antimonumento 2016). The energy that day was positive and productive, as people were taking care of and tending to the site. The following day a protest march, '¡Vivas nos Queremos!' (We want women alive!), took place in Mexico City and across the country against gender violence (Animal Politico 2016). At some point in this march as protestors moved past the antimonumento words were spray painted onto the floor: *NosotrAs no somos Ayotzinapa, para ustedes sólo somos un número. Ni una menos* (Us *women* are not Ayotzinapa, for you we are only a number. Not one woman less). I was in northern Mexico on this day and the following few so had to rely on social media for information on what had happened. In some images online the words vivos los llevaron, vivos los queremos had been changed to say *vivas los llevaron, vivas las queremos*, the female version of the word 'alive', and there were various spray-painted comments and slogans on the antimonumento itself. There were discussions online that these images, however, were old or altered, and debates on

blogs and social media unfolded, explaining and defending why these women did this, others vilifying them for their actions (Radio Zapote 2016; Rodríguez, B. 2016).

This incident demonstrates the ways that once in public space, monuments and memorials can have different meanings inscribed, beyond the imagination of those who constructed it and what they thought it would speak to. The antimonumento for Mexico's disappeared became caught up in a debate on gender violence. When I visited the antimonumento soon after this incident, although attempts had been made to clean the writing off the floor, it was still visible; traces of this intervention remained. Although giving the appearance of solid permanence, the antimonumento is still very much dynamic. Furthermore, it was constructed without permission and could be removed at any time. In this case the dichotomy of permanent and ephemeral is unrepresentative of how such places actually exist. Things – sculpture, monuments, memories – are never simply permanent or temporary, they are practiced and produced by people, and exist in our environments and life takes place around them.

In the memorial landscape so far outlined, the +43 antimonumento is a quick response to disappearance and impunity that has come from relatives and those who accompany them. This relatively short time frame between violent event and memorial contrasts with the Museo Casa – it has an urgency and immediacy to it that differs to the long struggle of Comité ¡Eureka!. The +43 antimonumento is present in the centre of the capital city, in front of institutions, demanding *¿donde están?* (where are they?), to speak for relatives from across the country who cannot always be there. It is less about the appropriation and subversion of space like the interventions of Comité 68, or the creation of a space of education and preservation like the Museo Casa, but is instead about the claiming of space. In this sense it defies impunity, it refuses to be silent.

A space for life and grief: the Plaza de los Desaparecidos

I now want to turn to the final example of memorials to the disappeared that this chapter looks at, and this time to move away from Mexico City. The Plaza de los Desaparecidos (Square of the Disappeared), in the centre of Monterrey, Nuevo León,

was appropriated by an association of relatives of the disappeared. In the plaza we can see elements like those of the memory work of the interventions of Comité 68, the Museo Casa, and the +43 antimonumento – it names the missing, appropriates and claims public space, denounces the state – all of which engage in a politics of time. But it is also the creation of a space of peace and life amidst violence and fear. And here, the sense of the personhood of the disappeared and their relatives is foregrounded.

The city of Monterrey, the state capital of Nuevo León in northeast Mexico, was transformed by violence in 2011 for several years, and what this meant for its residents will be explored in the following chapter. In 2012, an association of people searching for disappeared relatives formed, named Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Nuevo León (FUNDENL, United Forces for our Disappeared in Nuevo Leon; FUNDENL 2018). Alongside their searches they have been creating memory and their Plaza de los Desaparecidos has become central to them as an organisation. The Plaza was semi-abandoned by the municipality when the city centre and public space in general was affected by the insecurity, fear, and violence that took over the city (Rizzo 2016). The plaza was originally named the Plaza de Breve Espacio, and later the Plaza de los Toreros after the inclusion of three sculptures of local bullfighters on large plinths (Ramírez Atilano 2015). But it has now become known as the Plaza de los Desaparecidos amongst Monterrey's residents, and this is the name given on Google Maps.

I made just one visit to Monterrey in April 2016, a short flight or a twelve-hour bus ride from Mexico City. I had been told about the Plaza and the actions FUNDENL were doing in regards to memory and their searches for their relatives, and went to the city to learn more. Cordelia Rizzo, who has supported FUNDENL since they formed, took me to the Plaza one weekday morning and showed me around. A rectangular sunken pool structures the Plaza, sometimes with water, sometimes dry. At one end of the pool is a large glass sculpture, and at the opposite end is a small platform. Behind the platform and along one long side of the pool is amphitheatre style step seating, and the other two sides are steep walls (Figures 10, 11, and 12). The long wall is used as a space to paint messages and murals, and on my visit it boasted large colourful portraits of Roy Rivera Hidalgo, Kristian Karim Flores Huerta, and Gloria Karina

Oliva Ayala, three of FUNDENL's disappeared. Since this date several others have been added. On the glass sculpture FUNDENL have placed the names of the disappeared and the date they were taken, mirroring the interventions of Comité 68 in the Memorial a las Víctimas de la Violencia, and transforming the glass sculpture into a memorial for their disappeared.

Figure 10: The Plaza de los Desaparecidos, Monterrey.

Figure 11: The pool at the Plaza de los Desaparecidos, Monterrey.

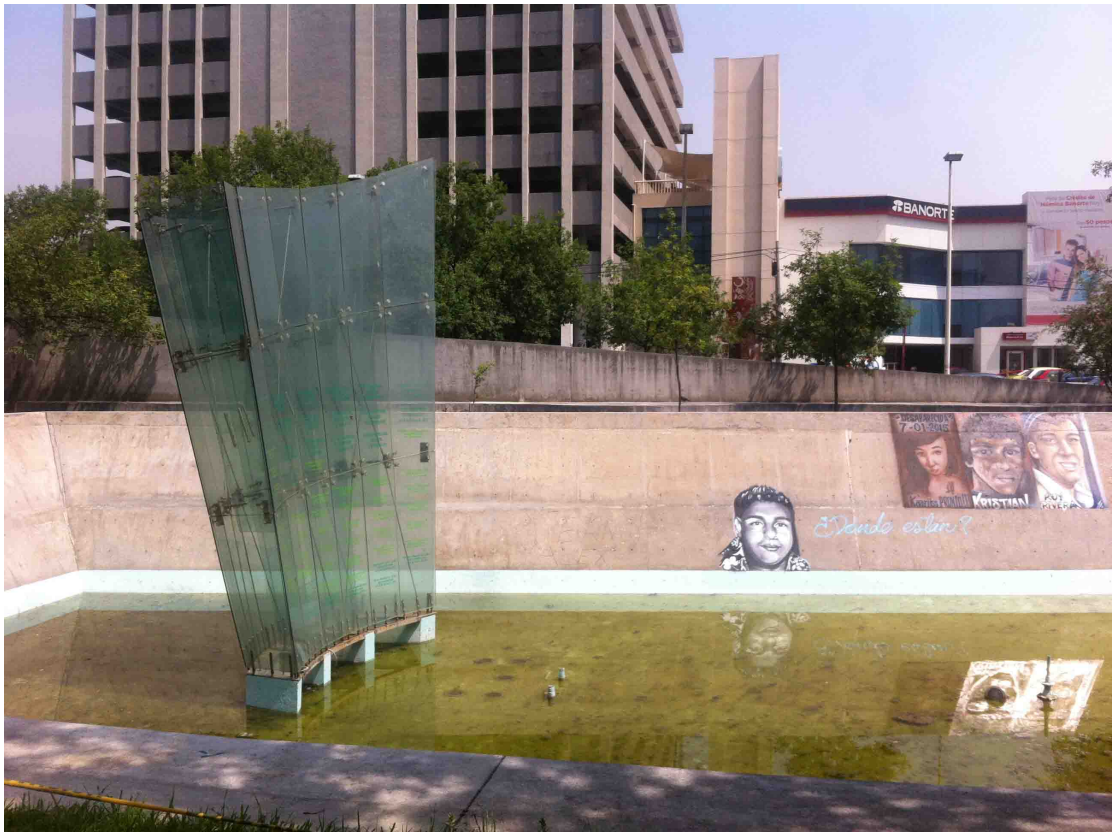

Figure 12: Names on the glass sculpture and portraits on the wall, the Plaza de los Desaparecidos, Monterrey.

The Plaza was appropriated on 11 January 2014, the three-year anniversary of the disappearance of Roy Rivera, son of Irma Leticia Hidalgo (Letty), the co-founder of FUNDENL. In September 2016, some months after my visit to Monterrey, I spent time with Letty in the UK and had the chance to speak to her about her activities. She explained that the appropriation of the Plaza came about in a moment when she did not have much energy to fight with the state in the search for Roy, and she wanted something that would make him, and the other disappeared FUNDENL are searching for, present amongst the government institutions when she could not be there herself (Hildago 2016). Just one block from the Plaza de los Desaparecidos is the Palacio de Gobierno, the office for the government of the state of Nuevo León, and many other government institutions and newspaper offices are in the vicinity. Like the +43 antimonumento, the Plaza is in their sight, defying, demanding, and denouncing. Letty began researching memorials, looking at responses to disappearance in other parts of Latin America, and she was drawn to the Memorial en Recordación de los Detenidos Desaparecidos (Memorial in Remembrance of the Detained Disappeared) in Montevideo, Uruguay, which has the names of the disappeared engraved onto two glass walls (Madres y Familiares de Uruguayos Desaparecidos 2014). A friend of Letty's who knew she was exploring these ideas saw the abandoned plaza, complete with its glass sculpture, and took her to see it. Immediately she knew this was their plaza (Hidalgo 2016a).

When they first took the plaza in January 2014, they placed the names of about ten of the disappeared on the glass sculpture, but in April of that year local authorities had them removed (Martínez 2014). This received public criticism and FUNDENL replaced the names: this time they have remained. They add more names to the sculpture when they can and need to – when I visited there were over thirty. Like the +43 antimonumento and the interventions of Comité 68 on the Memorial a las Víctimas, for now the intervention is tolerated by the authorities. However, the members of FUNDENL do not intend for the names to stay on the sculpture forever. Behind the step seating on the far end of the square is the busy Calle Ignacio Zaragoza, and on the patch of grass between the square and the road FUNDENL installed a plaque on a block of stone (Figure 10). The plaque records the date they inaugurated the square and, amongst other words, reads:

> We call on the following people
> whom we have not seen in a long time
> to remove their own name from the wall,
> with their own hand,
> until we recover all its transparency
> because we are waiting for them.
> Together with you,
> we are the ones who will create hope. (Plaza de los Desaparecidos 2016a).

As the quote shows, the names will be removed when the disappeared return to do so themselves.

The relatives did not want a monument as such, because the war is not over and they have not found the disappeared. They are aware of the dangers of a memorial that closes off the possibilities of action and justice, of "funerary functions" as Hite and Collins (2009) have called them, and the politics of time. Dairee Ramírez Atilano, another person who has supported FUNDENL since they began, explained to me when we met, "It's not a monument to help us to forget, it's a reminder that we are missing loved ones" (Ramírez Atilano 2016). The Plaza is a space that is lived and alive, where the disappeared in their personhood are present, their portraits are on the walls, and the relatives of FUNDENL engage in memory that is demanding, denouncing, caring, and personal. For the members of FUNDENL it is important to have a public space outside of their homes to represent their missing children, as Letty explained, through the Plaza their children have an active role in denouncing their own disappearance, "there they are in the Plaza, reminding us all to look for them" (Hidalgo 2018).

The ambiguity of disappearance deprives people of the rituals and social activities that we use to navigate life and death. When both are uncertain, rituals and spaces that help us with grief such as funerals and graves, as well as the rituals with which we celebrate life such as birthdays and anniversaries, are deeply complicated by the ambiguous loss, which will be explored in Chapter 6. The Plaza has become a place the relatives can go to have some sense of ritual (Hidalgo 2016a). Lourdes Huerta and Juani Solís of FUNDENL explained what the plaza means to them: "We feel safe there, we can go and sit and know it is our space" (quoted in Ramírez Atilano 2015,

no page). The Plaza has become the space where FUNDENL host all their activities. They hold press conferences; commemorate anniversaries of disappearances and birthdays; they have book presentations, music, and theatre performances. They set up in the plaza to collect DNA from people who have disappeared relatives, part of the Ciencia Forense Ciudadana project, which will be elaborated in Chapter 8. When they embroider for the project Bordando por la Paz y la Memoria, the focus of Chapter 5, they embroider in the plaza. In the campaigning for the 2018 Presidential elections they hosted María de Jesús Patricio Martínez – Marichuy – the independent candidate chosen by the National Indigenous Congress, when she visited the city.

Like the maintenance of the +43 antimonumento in Mexico City, the relatives of FUNDENL also clean and look after the Plaza. Karen Till (2012, p.8), in her work on memory in wounded cities, describes a place-based ethics of care as:

> including practices of attending to, caring for, and making place...practices [that] are grounded in memory-work and are fundamental in the establishment of differentiated and active forms of belonging and political community that might constitute more just and equitable democratic societies.

The relatives of FUNDENL have made their Plaza lived and social, claiming space for normal social activity and creativity, for life, in a context of insecurity. These diverse activities are about joy and connection as much as grief, absence, and activism, and in their context, provide precisely the sort of space, and connections such spaces enable, that violence and fear destroy. The Plaza de los Desaparecidos is fundamentally about hope and the future, about creating political possibilities.

I had the opportunity to see an event in the Plaza during my visit. FUNDENL held a press conference presenting an open letter to the Inter-American Human Rights Commission and the United Nations Working Group on Enforced Disappearance (Plaza de los Desaparecidos 2016b). The letter asked that the Grupo Interdisciplinario de Expertos Independientes (GIEI, Group of Interdisciplinary Independent Experts) stay in Mexico to continue their investigations into Ayotzinapa, and to come to Nuevo León to see the problem of disappearance there. The date was significant, falling on the nineteen-month anniversary of the disappearance of the students and days before the GIEI were due to leave Mexico after reaching their one-year remit. When we

arrived at the Plaza de los Desaparecidos members of FUNDENL and about six journalists and photographers were gathered above the wall where the portraits were painted. Letty asked for help with holding photographs of missing relatives and I obliged, holding two, and we stood in a semi-circle facing the photographers. Letty read aloud the letter that explained the official scale of disappearance in Nuevo León and compared it to FUNDENL's estimate and the number of unidentified bodies in state graves, while the reporters listened, recorded and photographed, with the Plaza in the background. She answered questions from the press who then left, and we stood around and reflected.

In the Plaza de los Desaparecidos FUNDENL have not just created a memorial but have, like Comité ¡Eureka!, created for themselves and those missing a space for conversation, recognition, and action in the city. Without permission or compromise they took the square and have transformed it from a neglected and under-used public space to one full of meaning and activity. They care for it and maintain it. They bring people to it and fill it with value and life. These actions, and the meaning the Plaza now holds in the wider Monterrey community, build an awareness and memory of the disappeared that is lived and located in every day consciousness. Like the +43 antimonumento, FUNDENL claimed a space for those absent in the centre of the city, alongside government institutions. The plaza is there, the disappeared present in the heart of the city and remind those who pass by that they are missing from all of us. Like the interventions of Comité 68 on the Memorial a las Víctimas de la Violencia they have named the missing and drawn their portraits in public space. Like the Museo Casa we get to know whom the missing and their families are, and what absence means to them. But the Plaza de los Desaparecidos is distinct in its sense of life. It is a space in which these families relate to their disappeared but also construct community in Monterrey, a city transformed by violence.

Conclusions

These examples of memorials and monuments begin to map the memorial landscape in Mexico that responds to disappearance specifically, and to violence in general. These examples, the Memorial a las Víctimas de la Violencia and the interventions of

Comité 68, the Museo Casa de la Memoria Indómita, the +43 antimonumento, and the Plaza de los Desaparecidos, give us some insights onto the texture of the struggles for memory in public space taking place in Mexico. Through examining the Memorial a las Víctimas de la Violencia we can see how the Mexican state engaged in the politics of memory in the public space of the city to narrate the war on drugs and its violence. Specifically, this memorial is an attempt to push the unresolved questions around this period of violence into a dead past and, to those ends, leaves the victims and perpetrators unnamed. The examples of memorialisation that followed are conscious interventions into the politics of memory and time. These memorial actions are placing the victims of disappearance and other crimes into the present present, aware of the power that being located in that space and time provides, as opposed to the disempowerment of being located in the dead past. Unlike the attempt of the Memorial a las Víctimas to close the past and move on with impunity, these memorials instead are forcefully claiming their space in society. In the Memorial a las Víctimas the state wants to hide the identities of the victims and the perpetrators. The other memorials looked at here name those responsible, overtly in the interventions of Comité 68 and at the Museo Casa, and more subtly by placing the +43 antimonumento and the Plaza de los Desaparecidos in the view of government institutions. The memorials explored in this chapter, furthermore, challenge the erasure of the personhood and identity of the victims. They do the opposite, they begin to talk about the disappeared as persons, they share and rebuild the personhood of the victims and their relatives.

These memorials to the disappeared are about presence in time *and* in space, and the need to locate those absent is part of a resistance to forgetting and maintaining the political agency of the disappeared. The following Chapter 4 will continue this focus on the spatial and geographical. However, memorials and memory sites do something different when looked at together, when we think of them as (part of) a collective or plural set of narratives, demands, and experiences. They are located in communities and have shaped those communities through their presence, both in physical changes to the built environment and in their capacity to communicate. The four memorials explored in this chapter tell us something about the struggles for memory in public space, however I want to move away from a focus on specific sites framed as if they are isolated from each other and their wider environments. I want to explore, now,

what it is to live in these environments of memory, to pass by them and to be haunted by memories. In Chapter 4 I will look beyond the visible, and put forward the concept of memoryscapes as a way to encapsulate a little more of the lived experiences of memory and absence in our environments.

As I mentioned in the introduction, the Memorial a las Víctimas is the only place in this thesis where a state response and engagement in memory will be examined. Everything else in this chapter has been in contrast to this, but so too is everything beyond it. Several themes from this chapter come through again and again in the thesis, those of naming, restoring personhood, public and private space, material form and representation, political communities, the creation of spaces, and many others. In the thesis this chapter needed to address the obvious, the clearly visible and present. It addressed what it seems has become the benchmark when we talk of memory and disappearance: the politics of memorials that have been constructed in public space and the biographies of these sites. The thesis will now start to go beyond these more typical or traditional ideas expected of an academic project on memorialisation, to explore the varied directions in which the politics of memory and disappearance weave with the lives of both relatives and others; to the environments in which we live, to arts-based collectives, to the searches for those missing.

Chapter 4: Memoryscapes

Urban landscapes condense layers upon layers of memories, though these may be blurred by the fast pace of urban life. Buildings, street corners, paving stones, and the names of squares and streets serve their own practical purposes while also indicating absences or attempting to communicate messages from the past. Multiple and diverse elements converge in the space of the city; its streets reveal individual stories, collective projects, and private and public tragedies

Max Page (2013, p.xviii)

In the previous chapter I began to map out the memorial landscape in Mexico that addresses disappearance by examining four memorials in Mexico City and Monterrey. In each of these memorials we can see a politics of time, which the state has enacted to attempt to push the victims of the war on drugs into the dead past (Bevernage and Aerts 2009), and which relatives and activists have resisted to keep the disappeared in the present present – present in time and space. In general, the methods used to keep the disappeared present in time and space have involved representing and reconstructing the personhood of the disappeared and dead, something which will be explored in depth in Chapter 5. This chapter, however, takes a turn in direction from the previous, moving away from examining memorials on a site-by-site basis, while still foregrounding the spatial. Building on Chapter 3, I want to think about memory as environment, or environment as memory: as a memoryscape. This is a shift in focus from the politics and narratives of sites and memorials to conceptualising memory as connected to landscape and examining the embodied experience of living within it.

Memorials are not experienced in geographic or emotional isolation; they are not detached from their context or the specific embodied experience of the person passing by. However academic writing tends to do just that: examine memory and memorials on a site-by-site basis. Karen Till recognised this limitation (2006a; 2006b), arguing that much work that explores memory and geography takes a "biography of a site" approach. To Till, at best these approaches recognise how these material forms are dynamic in space and time and how power relations are negotiated at these sites,

debates I covered in Chapter 3. At worst they are narrow in their exploration of how these sites work in their social context and how they are practiced, and reduce their contestations to "counter-memory as resistance" (2006a, p.329). Few studies use ethnographic, phenomonological, or psychoanalytic approaches to analyse memorials. Till (2006a, p.330) summarises, "Sites of memory have meanings that exceed their forms as authored representations of the past because of the ways individuals experience them affectively and how their forms circulate through various media".

As we saw in the previous chapter, memorials are sites of multiple contested politics, but they exist alongside other memorials, the city, people, communities, movement, and memories. They are part of broader geographical and emotional contexts and environments, and this chapter focuses on these connections. These environments contain marked or unmarked traces of previous events and memories, violent or traumatic and mundane: the corner where someone was disappeared or killed; the cafe frequented with someone who is now absent; spontaneous memorials and protests. Furthermore, memorials are known and experienced through the body, and embodied experience is shaped by personal histories and life experiences. Urban sociologist Fran Tonkiss (2005, p.113) explains, "The view [of the place] will depend, partly, on where you are standing and where you have come from". In contexts such as contemporary Mexico, embodied interaction with memorials takes place alongside embodied experiences of violence, fear, and absence, as well as the full spectrum of everyday memories and emotions that connect us to places. The concepts place memory and body memory recognise these different locations of memory (Casey 1996). Speaking of visiting his hometown, phenomenologist Edward Casey (1996, p.25) writes, "In my presence, it releases these memories, which belong as much to the place as to my brain or body".

Central to these ideas – how place and memory are embodied and social – is the connection between geographical space and place, and people, our emotions, memories, and practices. These theories have been developed over decades in fields such as phenomenology, sociology, and spatial theory (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Simmel 1969; de Certeau 1984; Lefevbre 1991; Bachelard 1994; Benjamin 1999). Within geography a great deal of work has built on these theories to explain space and place as practiced and socially produced (Massey 1991; Hayden 1994; Soja 1996; Amin

and Thrift 2002; Cresswell 2004; Massey 2005; Tonkiss 2005; Elden 2009). The concept of the palimpsest – how memories, even when not visible, layer and leave traces in place (de Certeau 1984, p.109; Huyssen 2003, p.1; Page 2013, p.xviii) – allows our imaginations to conceive of layers and traces of past events blending with the (built) environment. And, an idea that I take forward in this chapter, the city itself can be seen as a site of memory. Tonkiss (2005, p.120) explains how Walter Benjamin developed these ideas in his books *Berlin Chronicle* and *Arcades Project*, where,

> Buildings, spaces and objects hold onto meanings as pasts that are no longer visible press on the experience of the present. These past lives of a place represent layers of memory....The relationship of memory to space operates somewhere between the landmarks of the official city and the footfalls of the solitary subject.

These conceptualisations are pushing towards what I want to foreground in this chapter – the connection of geographical place and the psyche, that place is socially practiced and produced, and that traces of past material forms and social encounters remain in our environments. However, simply conceiving of memory as layered in place and as something we absorb as we pass through environments, still fails to capture the complex ways people experience memory. Spatial theorist Doreen Massey (1991; 2005) argues for a progressive sense of place and space that accounts for the multiple ways they are socially produced. To Massey, place is not simply a container for memories and space is not a surface on which they are layered, but place and space are co-produced through embodied practices, including memory. This is the view that Till (2012, p.6) develops; for her the city is an oeuvre, "constituted by its inhabitants through ongoing acts of making places".

To Andreas Huyssen (2003, p.28) lived memory is active and alive in the social sphere. Constructed memorials are not necessarily the principal sites of lived memory for victims and their relatives, or wider society. But they, alongside the settings in which we have lived our social lives, are part of the environment of memory we experience. Memorials exist alongside homes, workplaces, social spaces, marks of violence, emotions, and memories, and I want to explore them in that broader spatial context in this chapter. I want to put forward the concept 'memoryscape' to capture the

scale at which I want to explore memory. The term has been used before in varying contexts with varying meanings (Ballinger 2003; Butler 2007; Phillips and Reyes 2011; Kappler 2017), but in this chapter I use the term memoryscape to conceptualise simply a landscape of memory. This is to push towards a framework for memory that captures permanent memorials, temporary memorials, protests and other activities, and unmarked memories only visible to some, and how these are part of the environments in which we live. Memoryscapes are overlaid with other 'scapes' – economic, demographic, criminal; we experience the multiplicity of these topographies and boundaries as we go about our lives. I find John Wylie's (2005, p.240) writing on walking helps summarise the elements I am trying to bring together: "a range of practices – perceptions, memories, physical movements, distanciated topologies – are understood as being both in and of landscape, and gather landscape together as lived milieu".

When someone disappears memories of that person are connected with many spaces, including the home, the site of the disappearance, sites of memorials, virtual spaces, and micro-spaces such as arm chairs, park benches, or bars, each able to assault those who miss them with loss or with comforting memories, or both (Maddrell and Sidaway 2012, p.3). These memories and their marks can be disruptive to our lives and society (Wilde 2009), and memoryscapes of disappearance have a particular dimension in their ever-present sense of ambiguous loss. This jolting, uncanny sense of the presence of disappearance has been described as haunting, which has also been used more broadly to describe the connection of memory and place (de Certeau 1984; Lefebvre 1991; Gordon 2008; Bell and Di Paolantonio 2009; Aucher 2014). Within this memoryscape of disappearance people must navigate their lives, an experience of "wayfaring through an emotional-affective landscape of loss" (Maddrell 2013, p.513).

It is these conceptions of memory and our environments that I want to hold in mind in this chapter, as we explore (just some of) the memory environments in the cities of Mexico City, Cuernavaca, and Monterrey. Cuernavaca and Monterrey were transformed by violence and could be understood through the concept of "wounded cities" developed by Till (2012). Till uses this term regarding historical violence and injustice, but I suggest it can be used to think through the effect, on a city, of contemporary and ongoing violence. Till (2012, p.9) explains, "To understand my

notion of wounded cities as working metonymically and psychosocially, it is important to describe the complex interface between bodies, memory, social groups and the lived city, and affect". For their inhabitants the geography of the city changed, as every day places and practices became dangerous and environments in which people lived held traces of violence. These memories are experienced within a dynamic nexus of memorials, insecurity, and habitual life activities and events. Alongside and in between memorials these cities are full of graffiti, of missing persons posters, of marches and protests, of traces of those absent and violence that took place. I want to explore a broader sense of the embodied experience of these environments, and what living in and with them might be.

Rather than organise this chapter thematically, I have structured it around these cities. The same ideas will appear throughout – how memory is an embodied experience practiced beyond official spaces of remembrance; how memories of disappearance blend with other dynamics of urban life; how the same geography is experienced very differently at different times – but by describing these cities in turn I hope to bring to life the complex memoryscape of each. I do not believe the experience of a memoryscape is something limited to urban environments, and am aware my focus on the urban excludes the experiences of certain people. But the city has provided, for me in this project, a delimited space through which to examine memory at the scale of a 'scape'. This chapter, therefore, begins with Mexico City, and descriptions of two walks I took through its centre. I am beginning with this, not because I think my experience holds particular value, but because I can use my embodied experience to exemplify moving through a memoryscape. I then turn to Cuernavaca and Monterrey, to look at memoryscapes in cities beyond Mexico City and experiences beyond my own. These are cities that suffered extreme violence, which has left an impact on them, has wounded them. Disappearance is my focus, but it does not exist in isolation from other violences produced by the war on drugs, politics, or by urban and demographic changes. So, through foregrounding the spatial we find memories of disappearance layering with traces of these other dynamics. In her history of walking *Wanderlust*, Rebecca Solnit (2002, p.9) writes: "On foot everything stays connected, for while walking one occupies the spaces between those interiors in the same way one occupies those interiors. One lives in the whole world rather than in interiors built

up against it". This chapter, then, is about living in the whole world, about filling in some of the gaps between the isolated sites of memory seen in Chapter 3.

Mexico City: Mapping the memoryscape

To make the move from exploring memorials to thinking on the scale of a memoryscape, I want to describe some of my experiences of encountering the signs of disappearance in Mexico City, where I was based. Alongside memorials and sites of memory such as those explored in Chapter 3, temporary actions, often described as spontaneous or liminal memorials (Sella 2001; Jones et al. 2007; McKim 2010; Kellaher and Warpole 2012; Petersson 2012), are constantly taking place. As I lived, worked, and moved in Mexico City, I would come across physical markers or actions that would bring the violence and the disappeared into my present: missing persons posters, political graffiti, exhibitions, shrines, the debris of a protest, or artistic interventions. These things come and go in the city, and often my path would cross with them while I was moving – usually on foot, sometimes on buses and in cars. As explained in Chapter 2, I used autoethnographic walking as a method to try to understand the spatial relationship of memory and embodied experience, using an app to map and record photo, video, and audio along the way. The descriptions that follow, of two walks I took at different moments on the same road, are an attempt to convey and draw attention to an environment of memory, a memoryscape, and the embodied way we experience the markers and places of disappearance. This is never limited to specific sites of memory but expands across journeys we make daily. These descriptions may seem disjointed or messy, with many loose ends and hanging trains of thought. But this is what it is like to pass through our environments and be reminded fleetingly of absences, to catch glimpses of protests, to notice missing persons posters and then continue on.

Despite not suffering levels of violence across the city comparable to Cuernavaca or Monterrey, Mexico City has experienced violence and has memories that relate to the war on drugs. Furthermore, as the centre of political and economic power in the country, it is where relatives of victims have to meet with state institutions and where denunciations of the violence, memorialisation efforts, and demands for justice often

take place. Geographer Tim Ingold (2010, p.121) argues walking is a process of thinking and knowing; that we become knowledgeable along the paths we take through our everyday activities, rather than obtaining knowledge from fixed locations. Rebecca Solnit (2002, p.13) takes a similar view: "Exploring the world is one of the best ways of exploring the mind, and walking travels both terrains". As we live and walk in our environments we are affected by them; we see the lives of other people, we experience personal memories, and we gain some understanding of our worlds. In these environments, memorial and other material remains decay, they weather and change in the conditions of the city. They are placed and they are removed. They are painted over and sometimes revealed. Flows of people come and go. Walls and fountains and other architecture are used and appropriated, blending the geography of the city and monuments that narrate national heritage with memoryscapes of absence and impunity. Traces of memory are left in the landscape and they are experienced constantly in daily life.

In early November 2015 I began a walk at the Monumento a la Revolución (Monument to the Revolution), a solid stone monument several stories high set in a large open esplanade in the centre of Mexico City. I began here, as it is one of the public spaces in the city used for protest. At that time of year it is common to see elaborate *ofrendas* (offering, altar, or shrine) for *Dia de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) in public spaces, and on the esplanade an *ofrenda* had been installed, alongside banners that demanded justice for Ayotzinapa. I walked under the tall arches of the Monumento a la Revolución and towards Avenida Reforma. The road De La República connects the esplanade with Reforma precisely at the +43 antimonumento explored in Chapter 3. I crossed the pedestrian crossing and stood in front of the anti-monument, and noticed that the *milpa* (maize) that had been planted was drying out. The city moved around it as normal, traffic police stood nearby and as pedestrians crossed the road some looked up at the +43 and others walked straight by.

From here I headed up Avenida Reforma and almost every statuette, which are at regular intervals, was spray-painted with political criticisms and demands. I felt like I was following the traces of a protest, imagining the circumstances in which these words were written. Avenida Reforma stretches from the centre of Mexico City through progressively wealthier neighbourhoods, and this part of the city is a hub of

government institutions and offices. About half way between the antimonumento and Chapultepec Park is the *plantón* for Ayotzinapa in front of the Procuraduría General de la República (PGR, the Attorney General). A *plantón* is something like a camp or an occupation, similar to that which was for years outside the Houses of Parliament in London in protest against the Iraq war (Beckett 2011). The PGR has ultimate responsibility for searching for the disappeared and declared the "historic truth" about the case of Ayotzinapa: that the students had been killed (OHCHR 2018a, p.2). Adorning the *plantón* on all sides were large photos of the forty-three students, naming them and demanding *¿donde están?* (Where are they?). A large *Dia de los Muertos* sculpture and *ofrenda* covered the pavement, dedicated to members of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN, Zapatista Army of National Liberation) who had been killed since they were founded in 1994. The majority of pedestrians were dressed like office workers, out for lunch in the afternoon. People stopped to look at the *ofrenda* and from the *plantón* a young man was telling the story of the attack on the forty-three through a loudspeaker.

As I progressed up the road I noticed fewer and fewer spray painted slogans on the street furniture and walls. The mapping process, taking and uploading photos, is what made me notice this, as I was stopping less frequently. The map demonstrates where visible markers are clustered and where they are sparse in a way that I may not have noticed otherwise, and how these marks exist on the same topography as the social, political, and economic geographies of the city (Figure 13). Passing the iconic Ángel de la Independencia (Angel of Independence, a golden angel on top of a column in the middle of Reforma), surrounded by Mexico's three tallest buildings and at the corner of Chapultepec Park, is the Estela de Luz, a tower built to commemorate 200 years of independence. This tower was highly contested due to the costs of building it and there have been various attempts to appropriate it as a memorial for victims of the violence (Animal Político 2013). This day there was no intervention on the tower itself, yet I knew there had been previously. I knew that crowds had gathered there before, that there used to be embroidered handkerchiefs inside Perspex boxes on the ground. Instead of handkerchiefs, there are now around thirty metal plaques installed across the pedestrian space at the foot of the Estela, dedicated to people who have been disappeared and killed. A security guard stood at the edge of the open space in the shade and watched me reading them.

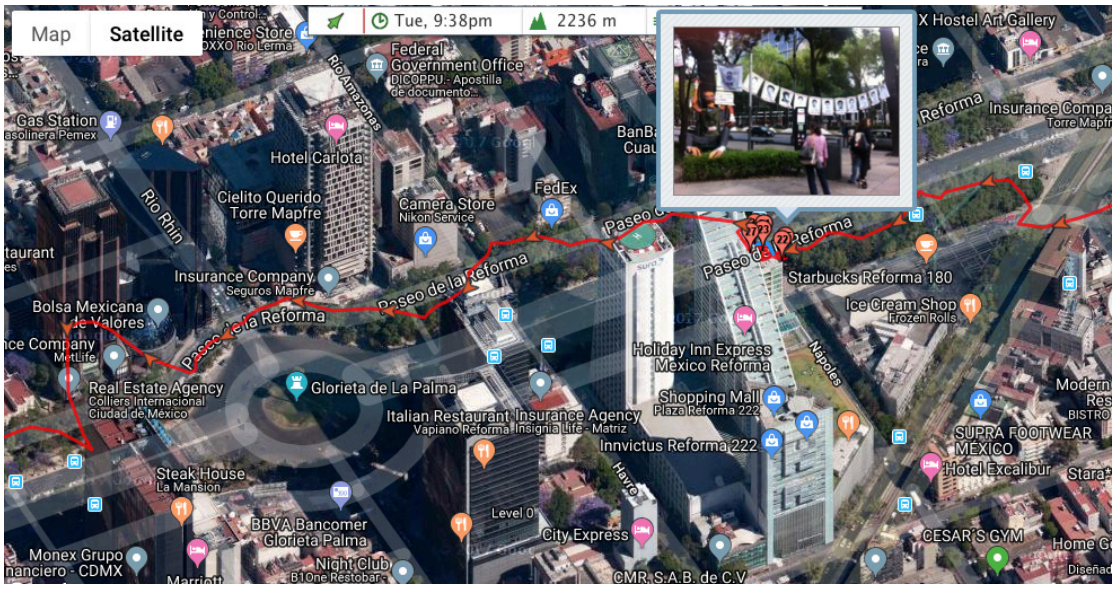

Figure 13: Screenshot of part of my mapped walk along Avenida Reforma.

From here Avenida Reforma passes adjacent to Chapultepec Park and the many national museums that are located there, housing the country's art and artefacts: the Museum of Modern Art, the National Anthropology Museum, the National History Museum, and the museum at Chapultepec Castle. This section of Reforma, with the park to both sides, is used as an outdoor exhibition space with display boards at regular intervals. As I walked I passed a photographic exhibition that told the story of classic Mexican cinema. After the park you come to the grand entrance of the modernist Auditorio Nacional (National Auditorium), which then neighbours the vast military barracks Campo Militar Marti, until you reach the Memorial a las Víctimas de la Violencia, explored in Chapter 3.

Avenida Reforma is an artery through the heart of Mexico City, and the buildings and landmarks along it narrate national history: colonisation, independence, revolution, pre-Colombian culture, contemporary economics, political institutions, and demographic and class dynamics. And on top of this we pass markers and traces that tell us of the violence of the war on drugs, including the haunting and dispersed presence of disappearance. Walking and mapping this route demonstrates the complexity of our memoryscapes, and the embodied and everyday experience of moving within it. Half a year later, I found myself walking a section of Avenida Reforma in a very different context. The seasons had changed, the trees were in full

bloom, and I had changed too. My research had taken me to other places, I had gotten to know people involved in the search for the disappeared, and I had learned through listening and participating in those months.

Since 2011 relatives of the disappeared have used Mother's Day, May 10th, to protest the absences in their homes (movimiento por nuestros desaparecidos en México 2018b). This day in 2016, I walked from the intersection of Avenida Reforma with Avenida Insurgentes up to the Ángel de la Independencia with the Mothers' Day march, alongside hundreds of relatives of the disappeared. I arrived at the esplanade where the Monumento de la Madre (Monument to Mothers) is located, a block from Avenida Reforma and the starting place for the march. There were several hundred people already there; mostly relatives with banners laid out, the majority of people wearing white. I bumped into people I had come to know, both personally or through my research: relatives from Ayotzinapa, Nuevo León, Morelos, Michoacán, and journalists, activists, and academics from Mexico City who accompany the relatives. People meet and make plans while marching; connections are made on foot.

We moved very slowly in the march, some moments quiet but still connecting with those gathered there, other moments loud as voices joined together to shout demands. The protesters carried photographs of the disappeared, often worn on their bodies or printed onto t-shirts. As the crowd approached the PGR and the *plantón* for Ayotzinapa the march slowed down so that denunciations could be shouted towards the building, each association or group of relatives taking their turn. We arrived to the Ángel de la Independencia, a tall column surrounded by steps, which the relatives climbed and arranged themselves on, placing their banners and photographs to face down Avenida Reforma and the route we had just walked. At this point I stayed in the road, which had been cordoned off to traffic, and listened to the relatives' speeches, sharing stories of disappearance and search through loudspeakers (Figure 14). Eventually the road was reopened and the crowds began to disperse; traffic started to flow once more up Reforma.

Figure 14: Mothers Day march at the Ángel de la Independencia.

Through these two walks I hoped to demonstrate the embodied nature being in a memoryscape of disappearance, and how the same street, the same geography, was part of two very different experiences. In the first I was alone, paying attention to the stories in the environment. In the second, I was moving with a group of people who knew the experience of disappearance acutely. Some trace of our movement that day would have remained, in minds and in material form, as have the Mothers' day protests that had walked those streets before, the legacy of which we could feel. And these memories of disappearance are experienced consecutively with scapes of history, economy, and others. I began with this description of my experience in Mexico City in order to demonstrate the things we see beyond memorials and designated sites. As we move, live, work, be in place, memories come to us, we see traces of what has been there before mixed with what is present now, we encounter and connect with people and places. From one day to the next our environments change, the dramas they are stage to come and go, and each person combines their personal experience with it. This is the complexity of memoryscapes; memory is lived

and practiced in the blend of social exchanges, physical markers, and embodied experience.

Building on these ideas, I now want to turn to explore some of the memoryscape of two cities that have been epicentres of recent violence, including disappearance. In them, although the sense of violence is much more present, we see again how their memoryscapes combine between memorials and personal experience, between the dynamics of urban change and politics, between what is visible and what is in the minds of their inhabitants. Violence has changed these cities, and people's experiences of the city and their lives have changed in turn. Although there are similar themes across these two cities, I describe them separately in order to give a sense of the geography of these places, how the places I describe map onto their urban plans, to give some sense of the fullness of being in these places.

Cuernavaca, Morelos

Cuernavaca is the capital city of the state of Morelos, about two hours South-West of Mexico City. It became one of the hotspots of the war on drugs from 2009 to 2011 when criminal groups used the city to demonstrate their strength and power, and in 2011 a victim-led movement for peace sprung from the city and spread nationwide. As well as bringing victims across the country together, this movement, the Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad (Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity), has worked with local institutions and artists on memorials in the city, as well as undertaking legal campaigning and searching for the disappeared. For this reason I travelled to Cuernavaca, expecting to find some marks of its recent violence in its landscape. Across three trips to the city I visited memorials, attended public events, and met people working to support victims in Morelos. Here the violence produced a local activism that connected with institutions in the city, and my descriptions move between the memoryscapes of the UAEM university campus and the city centre.

The war on drugs arrived in Cuernavaca one night in December 2009 when a marine operation killed Arturo Beltrán Leyva of the Beltrán Leyva cartel (Gibler 2012;

Saviano 2015). A few days later the first *narcomanta* arrived, a message written on a cloth banner and hung in public space, communicating threats or cartel activities, and this one declared war. Journalist John Gibler (2012, p.130) explained, "during the nights destroyed bodies began to arrive. The language of terror was written on human beings who had been decapitated, dismembered, disfigured, and hung from bridges". Through this highly visible and spectacular violence, and of course through fear, the city's streets and neighbourhoods changed. Cartels and the state fought their war in public space, a fight for control of territory and resources, and these events are now a part of the memories embedded in the city.

This violence, of course, spread. It spilled over into the lives of everyone who lived there and, in a case like many others, on 28 March 2011 Francisco Sicilia Ortega, son of internationally known poet Javier Sicilia, was murdered alongside six other young people (Pastrana 2012). In response to his son's murder, Javier renounced poetry and instigated the Movimiento por la Paz, whose first action just weeks after Francisco's murder was to walk from Cuernavaca to Mexico City. This four-day walk was the first of several *caravanas* (caravans) that Sicilia undertook that year, which crossed the country joining communities and victims together in their demands for justice, enabling them to see for the first time that they were not isolated but part of a widespread violence, and providing a space and the courage for many victims and relatives to speak out for the first time (Pastrana 2012). The Movimiento and Sicilia also began to work closely with the Universidad Autónima del Estado de Morelos (UAEM, Autonomous University of the State of Morelos) in Cuernavaca, and the UAEM have since set up the Programa de Atención a Víctimas (PAV, Programme of Assistance for Victims, PAV 2018).

On my first visit to Cuernavaca I headed to the centre of the city to look for markers of and memorials to the violence. In the Plaza de Armas outside the Palacio del Gobierno (the offices of the government of the State of Morelos), the Ofrenda de las Víctimas de la Violencia, an altar to the city and state's victims, had been installed. Plaques with the names of Francisco Sicilia and those he was killed with had been stuck to the wall of the Palacio and, on large metal gates, more than forty portrait photographs of the dead and disappeared were hung. On the floor at the foot of the gates were crosses, candles, and plants growing in pots that members of Movimiento

por la Paz care for and maintain (Figure 15). On the wall next to the Ofrenda is a small sign inviting people to call if they want to add a photograph. Traces of previous plaques that had been removed were also visible; the glue was left behind (Preciado 2016). A few metres into the plaza is the Árbol de la Memoria (Tree of Memory), a sculpture of a white tree roughly eight feet tall breaking through paving slabs, with ribbons tied to the branches naming victims of violence, which was installed in 2013 (Calvo 2016). On the floor is a plaque that states *"Porque tenemos Memoria, sembramos Justicia!"* (Because we have Memory, we sow Justice!; Figure 16).

Figure 15: Ofrenda de las Víctimas de la Violencia, Plaza de Armas, Cuernavaca.

Figure 16: Árbol de la Memoria, Plaza de Armas, Cuernavaca.

I returned to this plaza on 28 March 2016, to attend an event to mark the five-year anniversary of the murder of Francisco and his friends. I had contacted the Programa de Atención a Víctimas, PAV, and they told me of their plans to mark the date. The event, organised by PAV and Movimiento por la Paz, started in the cool morning air at 8am in front of the Ofrenda, and around sixty people had gathered for a press conference, including many relatives of victims. The crowd was addressed by several speakers; representatives of PAV, relatives of people killed and disappeared in Morelos and beyond, human rights defender Padre Alejandro Solalinde, the Rector of UAEM Dr Jesús Alejandro Vera Jiménez, and Javier Sicilia (Plaza de Armas 2016). After the press conference collective Arte Acción Cero12 gave a short performance in the plaza between the Ofrenda and Árbol. Two people in black jumpsuits and red

balaclavas, holding a blood-soaked Mexican flag, gave monologues while an actress in a tatty dress carrying holy water, jerkily moved between pictures of the dead and disappeared on the floor. She moved over to the Ofrenda and laid down a pink Ni Una Mas cross (Not One More Woman), a protest against gender violence (Figure 17).

Figure 17: Performance during the event to mark 28 March, Plaza de Armas, Cuernavaca.

During the event that day a photograph of Oliver Wenceslao Navarrete Hernández, disappeared on 24 May 2013, was added by his mother María Hernández. Oliver's case was at the centre of a mass excavation of corpses that was taking place over those weeks. Oliver was found, murdered, on 3 June 2013, and his family positively identified his body. Yet, somehow his body then disappeared while in the hands of the state. The fight of María Hernández to find her son revealed a clandestine state grave in the town Tetelcingo, some miles from Cuernavaca. Oliver, along with 150 others, was buried there on 28 March 2015, one year to the day before this commemoration (Villanueva Guzmán and Brito 2016). After the event in the plaza in Cuernavaca, the members of PAV and the Movimiento por la Paz headed to the mass grave at

Tetelcingo to hold a second commemoration and press conference. The excavation of these bodies was at that moment national news, and seemed to be hanging over the state of Morelos.

As with my two walks down Avenida Reforma in Mexico City, I saw the Plaza de Armas on two very different occasions. The Ofrenda and Árbol have become part of the plaza and every day activities take place around them; the square still buzzes with the hum of vendors and families and people passing through. But they are also used at times when more direct attention needs to be brought to the problems of violence and ongoing injustice. These insertions into the built environment of the city are constructing a visible element of the social memory of this recent violence and the environment accommodates them and adjusts around them. But even though these memorials have claimed a space, they are very much dynamic; we saw that with the removal of name plaques, in the addition of the portrait of Oliver. The plaza and people's memories change with each event that takes place there, with each press conference held.

While the group headed to Tetelcingo, I took a taxi to the UAEM campus in the north of the city, to visit a memorial that had been installed a few weeks before (Sánchez Lira and Mendoza Vergara 2016). I was dropped at the main entrance and walked down Avenida Universidad away from the campus where, at the end of the road, I found the memorial 28 de marzo. The memorial consists of two monoliths, referred to as *lápidas*, gravestones, on a grassy area separating the two directions of traffic on the road known now as Calle 28 de Marzo, after a part of the Avenida Universidad was re-named in memory one year before (UAEM 2015a; UAEM 2015b; Figure 18). The memorial (and street), takes its name from the date of the murder of Francisco Sicilia, the date of the day I was visiting. In comparison to the Ofrenda in the Plaza de Armas the location of this memorial feels peripheral: from the bustle of the centre of the city, to this street in a neighbourhood adjacent to, but not on, the UAEM campus. Yet even in this peripheral location its presence is still controversial. The memorial I saw that day was the third version to have been placed on that site, after the first was removed and the second was vandalised (CEAV 2015; SinEmbargo 2015; UAEM 2015c; Sánchez Lira and Mendoza Vergara 2016).

Figure 18: Memorial 28 de marzo, Avenida 28 de marzo/Universidad, Cuernavaca.

In May 2016 I returned to Cuernavaca a third time, to speak with staff from the PAV. After meeting in their office Héctor Sánchez Lira and Fernando Mendoza Vergara drove me back to the memorial 28 de marzo, and then on to the UAEM campus to see an intervention exploring disappearance. At the heart of the campus is a large statue of Emiliano Zapata that had been completely covered in black rope. Local artist Laura Valencia Lozada has made this intervention – a project she calls Cuendas, a word that describes a small piece of cord that collects together the threads of cotton in a skein – on several statues in Mexico City, one in Caracas, Venezuela, and this one at the UAEM. The project explores the tensions between absence, representation, and disappearance (Valencia Lozada 2018). Her process is considered and slow: working with relatives, Valencia Lozada calculates, by height and weight, the volume of the body of a specific person who has disappeared. She then calculates a quantity of black rope to that volume. A group of people covered this statue, a process that took several hours (Sánchez Lira and Mendoza Vergara 2016). Once covered, the statue is temporarily hidden, but the body of the disappeared person and the void their absence leaves in our lives and environments is visible (Diéguez 2018; Figure 19). Fernando

and Héctor explained that after each roll of rope was finished the group paused to read poetry and other small commemorative performances. The statue was going to be covered for roughly one month, and the ropes then unravelled to coincide with a seminar they had organised on the subject of absence (Sánchez Lira and Mendoza Vergara 2016).

Figure 19: Cuendas by Laura Valencia, on the statue of Emiliano Zapata on the UAEM campus, Cuernavaca.

As we stood there watching people walk through the campus Fernando commented, "ask any student, they will all have experienced the violence" (Sánchez Lira and Mendoza Vergara 2016). The depth of this statement is hard to appreciate in a city transformed by violence; it is estimated that the death of one person can have an impact on 200 others (Hernández 2012a). We got into the car and began to head back to their offices, passing by the Faculty of Psychology, which has a large mural painted on one side of the building. The mural commemorates a student of theirs who was disappeared, and her portrait is painted in the centre with the words, "This mural will be removed on the day that our *compañera* Viridiana returns to walk the corridors of

this faculty again" (Figure 20). Like the names in the Plaza de los Desaparecidos and the +43 antimonumento in Chapter 3, the mural will be present while the person is absent. Disappearance and murder are now a part of campus life because the students are affected by it, because there are absences in classrooms. Students carry fear and pain with them in their bodies, and absence is present in the space and architecture of the campus, visibilised in the hidden sculpture of Zapata and this mural to Viridiana.

Figure 20: Mural to Viridiana, UAEM campus, Cuernavaca.

In the car returning to their office Héctor and Fernando shared stories of other informal interventions of memory in the city that they knew of. Some people are painting stars on the ground where a person has been killed, and in one neighbourhood the community is painting murals for residents where their murders took place, but this is a neighbourhood that, due to insecurity, neither they nor I could go to (Sánchez Lira and Mendoza Vergara 2016). On my first visit to the memorial 28 de marzo I walked through the adjacent neighbourhood towards a main road to find a bus back to the centre. On this visit with Héctor and Fernando we drove up the same road I walked down but in the opposite direction, towards the memorial, and passed

under a banner strung across the street stating *aquí no llamamos a la policía* (here we don't call the police), above an image of a gun. Alongside the visible markers of memory and violence are territories and landscapes of violence that can be invisible to an outsider, to someone not affected, not living it. These geographies are seen and felt based on personal knowledge and experienced, and overlap and layer with memoryscapes.

In the Plaza de Armas and the UAEM campus we can see memoryscapes of the recent violence in Cuernavaca, including disappearance. Violence swept over the city and changed it, added to its place memory, impacted the lives of those who live there. Memorials are installed, others are removed, and activities that take place around them ebb and flow with daily life and the task of fighting for justice. Within the memoryscape is the tension of "the play of the trace, of absence and presence, of stories told and not told" (Till 2006b, p.11). There is a sense of movement and the spatial to these actions: *caravanas*, territories, clandestine graves, murals and memorials. And these actions and activities build up; they layer like a palimpsest but are part of a dynamic memoryscape that people live among and produce. In contrast to the walks I described in Mexico City, the presence of the violence and fear in Cuernavaca is close, and is part of the imaginative landscape of the city for a broad section of its inhabitants.

Monterrey, Nuevo León

I want now to return to Monterrey, to situate the Plaza de los Desaparecidos seen in Chapter 3 in its broader context, to see it in a memoryscape. Monterrey, Mexico's third largest city, known for its wealth and its industry, is the capital of the state Nuevo León in the northeast of the country. Just 140 miles from the border with the United States, it has a large middle class and is home to the municipality San Pedro Garza Garcia, the wealthiest municipality in Mexico (Patiño 2016). However, like Cuernavaca, Monterrey went from being a safe region to one of the principle hotspots of violence in the country in 2011 (Álvarez Ibarra et al 2016, p.40), "a type of violence designed to inflict fear, to terrorise" (Villarreal 2016, p.184). Like Cuernavaca, bodies and *narcomantas* were hung from bridges across the city,

kidnappings soared, shootouts and grenades left marks in the streets, and thousands disappeared (Emmott 2011; Fernández 2012). In Monterrey, we see how absence and ruins can haunt streets.

As explained in Chapter 3, I was invited to Monterrey by Cordelia Rizzo, who accompanies the relative's association Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Nuevo León (FUNDENL, United Forces for Our Disappeared in Nuevo León) who appropriated the Plaza de los Desaparecidos. Like Cuernavaca, memories of violence and fear are felt on every corner of the city, and have been met with actions and activities that resist and explore this haunting. People's lives and routines, the ways they moved and lived in the city, transformed under the violence. FUNDENL have said that when they visited a high school and asked a group of students if they had a friend or relative who had disappeared, at least half raised their hands, from a group of 100 (Vélez 2016a). In Monterrey I will bring together experiences of disappearance with other physical violences such as murder, but also with demographic, economic, and urban transformations, from city to micro scales, from highly public to personal experiences. Highly visible displays of violence blend with the invisibility of disappearance. Flows and waves of people and activity come and go and traces are left behind, some rhythms of these movements remain.

The Plaza de los Desaparecidos is in an important geographical context within the city: it is a small plaza at the far end of a series of plazas and public spaces built in the 1980s and known collectively as the Macroplaza. Government institutions, monuments that narrate a certain national and state history, and newspaper offices surround it. As we saw in Chapter 3 it is a dynamic space that stages a variety of events, and the plaza itself was abandoned through processes of urban desolation due to the violence, as well as economic and political factors. A couple of blocks away into the Macroplaza is the Palacio de Gobierno, the government of the state of Nuevo León, a grand building with an enormous open paved space in front named the Explanada de los Héroes. The Explanada is vast and open hosting two statues of those 'heroes'. From the Palacio the Macroplaza becomes a landscaped garden adorned with fountains, and beyond this is a section called Plaza Zaragoza, a typical Mexican plaza very much used by the city's inhabitants. In the evenings it bustles with people and families enjoying the cooler temperatures and buying street food. One area of this

plaza is common for street entertainers, and is where the Vaquero Galáctico (the Galactic Cowboy), Melchor Flores Hernández, worked and was known in the city, before he was disappeared by police on 3 March 2009 (Milenio 2010).

Further into this plaza is a *kiosko*, a bandstand, where members of FUNDENL sat weekly for nine months in 2012 and embroidered handkerchiefs for their disappeared children and others killed in the violence that had enveloped their city, explored in Chapter 5. They would string their handkerchiefs across the bandstand or from tree to tree, to make the victims present in public space at a time when simply being in the city centre was dangerous (Rizzo 2016). And at the very end of the plaza is the Palacio Municipal, the local government offices, outside which the original members of FUNDENL held their first protest, displaying photos of their disappeared children and catching the attention of people leaving Sunday mass at the Cathedral (Rizzo 2016). Across the Macroplaza, government institutions, acts of violence, acts of resistance, and fixed and ephemeral memorials, create the memoryscape of the city.

Just to the east of the Macroplaza is the Barrio Antiguo, Monterrey's old town, and in one of its new cafés on a recently pedestrianised street I met Dairee Ramírez Atilano, who had been accompanying FUNDENL since they began. Demographic changes have taken place in recent years and transformed neighbourhoods such as the Barrio Antiguo. The wealthiest *regiomontanos* (people from Monterrey) fled to the United States and sent their children to study abroad to escape the violence. The centre of the city was semi-abandoned and gated communities were constructed in the suburbs, while the poorest and most vulnerable outside the city came in for protection (Ramírez Atilano 2016; Rizzo 2016). Internal displacement is a vast but under acknowledged problem in Mexico: a nearby town, Miguel Alemán in Tamaulipas, was abandoned by authorities while two cartels fought for the plaza, and the town shrank from 14,000 to 300 residents (Solís 2016, p.205). These flows affect and change a city; the Barrio Antiguo is now starting to recover a little from this abandonment and is undergoing so-called regeneration (Ramírez Atilano 2016). But these streets are not how they were before, in part because of the violence and abandonment they witnessed, but also because a new community is here now. Cafés such as the one I was sitting in are new arrivals. This economic and demographic violence – inequality and gentrification – is connected to the physical violence of the

war. The city government wants to demonstrate that Monterrey is a safe, thriving place, to cover the violence with a veneer. The war has changed the topography of the city in many ways, and these changes – demographic, economic, architectural – leave traces in the environment.

In Monterrey "every corner has a story" (Ramírez Atilano 2016). Sitting in the café in the Barrio Antiguo, Dairee recounted that a block from where we were sat two people were shot and killed outside the Café Iguana, a popular hangout for young people, which was then closed for months. Afterwards, people painted around the bullet holes (which are still in the wall) with butterflies and flowers, but these were painted over (Figure 21). Describing ruins in post-war Cyprus, Yael Navaro-Yashin (2009, p.14) explained how residents traced the ruins in their communities, locating them in time and space: "'Those bullet holes are from 1963', they would say, 'whereas the bullet holes over there are from '74'". In Cyprus, he explains, both the material ruins and the people who live amongst them produce and transmit affect relationally: "[The inhabitants bring the ruins] into discourse, symbolize them, interpret them, politicize them, understand them, project their subjective conflicts onto them, remember them, try to forget them, historicize them, and so on" (Navaro-Yashin 2009, p.15). Some interventions are covered up, but some traces always remain, and the memories of the murders at Café Iguana will not be erased from the minds of those affected by it or those who pass by. The city has been stage to thousands of stories such as these; this is a lived experience of life with ruins, with haunted environments.

Figure 21: Bullet holes in the Café Iguana, Monterrey. Snapshot taken from Google Earth on 15 July 2018.

Monterrey witnessed one of the deadliest massacres of the war on drugs: the fire at the Casino Royale. In the afternoon of 25 August 2011 members of Los Zetas cartel doused the Casino in petrol and set fire to it while it was full of staff and customers, killing fifty-two people. Police say Los Zetas did this because the Casino had failed to pay extortion, but the death rate was compounded by blocked fire exits and substandard safety regulations, implicating the state in the deaths (Wilkinson 2011; Zabludovsky 2011). The city was shocked twice with this crime: first with the arson itself, and second when it became clear that those responsible were minors (Carrión 2012, p.175). Cordelia took me to the site one morning, and we parked in front of a neighbouring building and walked around to the Casino. Not much had changed since the day of the fire: black smoke still stained the walls around the windows and doors which had been boarded up, and the three holes that had been made in the external wall to pull out bodies were now filled with breezeblocks. A pile of weathered crosses, once a memorial to the victims, had been dumped just behind a chain that attempted to stop the public from getting close to the building (Figure 22). New crosses to replace these had in fact been installed, but they were partially obscured by a bus shelter.

Figure 22: Old memorial crosses at the Casino Royale, Monterrey.

The Casino is located on a very busy road with several lanes of traffic in both directions. On the first anniversary of the massacre, relatives of the disappeared and other embroiderers from the *kiosko* in the Macroplaza blocked a lane of traffic and hung embroideries they had made for each of the fifty-two victims (Rizzo 2016). On the grassy strip separating the two directions of traffic a memorial was constructed on the four-year anniversary of the massacre. It was a blue mosaic tiled fountain with a large stone in the middle, with fifty-two small fountains of water within it. It was designed by the daughter of one of the victims, and was promised to be much larger than what was finally constructed (Campos Garza 2014). However, when I visited it was reduced to rubble, apparently destroyed in a car accident (Campos Garza 2016).

The centre stone had been demolished, the fountains were dry, parts were missing, and mosaic tiles were scattered around (Figure 23).

Figure 23: The memorial at the Casino Royale, Monterrey.

The Casino Royale and the Café Iguana are two buildings that haunt this city as locations of murder, but the haunting of disappearance is more dispersed. In Argentina, Avery Gordon (2008, p.126) described disappearance as a "public secret". She explains (2008, p.113) how, to the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, "Disappearance was all around them, they smelled it, they sensed it, they felt its bewitching compulsion: it was always threatening to envelop them". And in Monterrey traces and reminders of disappearance are not only in the Plaza de los Desaparecidos but on streets and walls and in buildings across the city. Activists have changed street signs

to names of the disappeared, but these have lasted just a few weeks and then have been removed (Ramírez Atilano 2016). Portraits of the disappeared and the words "I'm still alive, search for me" are painted onto walls (Ramírez Atilano 2016) and are visual reminders for those who do not feel the absences caused by disappearance, and to those who do.

Angélica Ávila (Angie), a member of FUNDENL, is searching for her son Gino. He used to write graffiti, and she has experienced seeing words he has written still marked on the walls of the city. She wrote: "Since you were fifteen you practiced until you found the letters that represent you; now your signature, on buses, fences, and bridges, is what your Mum has left of you" (Márquez and Ávila 2016, p.53). In his absence, traces of Gino's previous paths and routes remain for those that know and love him to recognise. Irma Leticia Hidalgo (Letty), founder of FUNDENL, has experienced this kind of encounter with her son Roy who was disappeared. A recent Facebook profile photograph of hers took my attention, and I asked her the story behind it (Figure 24). A young local artist had painted a portrait of Roy on a wall in the centre of the city which, when we spoke, had been there a few years. The morning the photograph was taken, Letty and other mothers and friends of FUNDENL were heading out of the city to conduct a search for human remains in the countryside. She was driving and by coincidence stopped at a red traffic light, turned, "and there was my Roy, looking at me. I said to him out loud, 'I went looking for you and you found me'. It was a beautiful meeting" (Hidalgo 2018).

Figure 24: Leticia Hidalgo looking at a portrait of her son Roy, Monterrey. Reproduced with the permission of Leticia Hidalgo. Photo credit: Claudia Muñiz, FUNDENL collaborator.

Memories of violence and the presence of absence are felt in the homes of a city as well as in public space, which will be explored in depth in Chapter 6. Lourdes Huerta, co-founder of FUNDENL whose son Kristian was disappeared, describes:

> The war arrived to the house one day without notice....At first we did not really understand what had happened, so we behaved naturally. Then we became afraid. Sat in the living room, in front of the television, we saw the war cruelly shed the bitterest of words....And here they have us, uncomfortable in our own homes, in our jobs,

> between walls, between streets, and with a future which barely gives us courage to direct our gaze towards it (Márquez and Huerta 2016, p.85).

People experienced violence and insecurity in the geography of their everyday lives, and the ways they lived and moved had to adapt. After school streets would be deserted and no one went out at night (Ramírez Atilano 2016). Routes and routines changed, as Monterrey resident and academic Ana Villarreal (2016, p.184) described:

> In 2011 and 2012, many *regiomontanos* said to me: What time should we leave? What route should we take? Will it be safe? We had to redesign strategies to make the most basic daily life activities happen. Even though many fled to other Mexican cities or abroad, the majority of *regiomontanos* adapted their lives to the new levels of violence. Men and women of every social strata adjusted their times, work spaces, living spaces, night life, strolls, social circles, even ways of dressing to try to avoid robbery, kidnapping, and extortion.

The violence restructured the geography of the city and the lives of those who lived there. It transformed people; it is felt in homes, in memory, it seeps into every space.

Driving across the city, Cordelia told me the story of when she first saw a *narcobloqueo*, when cartels hijack a vehicle which they upturn and often set fire to, in order to block a route through the city and to terrorise (Saviano 2015, p.293). The topographies and geographies of the city are temporarily disrupted, but the memories of these incidents do not disappear, they haunt the city's residents as they go about their lives. In Monterrey, we can see demographic, economic, and urban changes produced by and producing violence. These wider processes and dynamics of the war and urban life are experienced at the same time as and alongside the haunting effect of disappearance and interventions that resist fear, which tell stories of those absent. In Monterrey, through the Macroplaza to the Barrio Antiguo to the homes of its residents and the spaces and routes that are travelled in between, we can start to understand how an affective landscape maps together the marked and unmarked, the joyful and the fearful, memories of resistance and hope with violence. Lived memory is created somewhere in these geographies, in the combination of these experiences, in the embodiment of being in and travelling through these scapes. The memories of disappearance and violence layer between our environments and our psyches; they are felt on both terrains.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have moved from my walks in Mexico City, to stories and experiences from two cities that became epicentres of the violence of the war on drugs, including disappearance. My intention in this chapter was to move away from discussions of memory and place that were limited to constructed memorials and a biography of a site approach. Visiting a memorial, monument, or museum simply is not representative of how we experience memory in our day-to-day. Instead, memory is a continuous experience, it is fluid and spontaneous, it is embodied and evoked by the marked and unmarked traces of things that have gone before and remain in our environments. I used my experiences in Mexico City to demonstrate what I am trying to push towards with the concept memoryscape, and to show how our experience of a place is embodied and changes daily. This was an attempt to destabilise the location of memory; it is not (only) at memorials and monuments, but on every corner, and in every person. I also hoped to demonstrate that walking particularly, but moving in many ways, is a way of knowing and experiencing, but also of recalling and remembering. Violence is written into the environments where it happened and in Cuernavaca and Monterrey the city's plazas, bridges, and highways were used to display and communicate terror. But so too are acts of resistance and love, which produce and shape the spaces they take place in. In Cuernavaca, residents are reclaiming and marking spaces to resist the territorialising aspects of violence. In Monterrey, through traces of violence and demographic change we see how it feels to live with ruins.

In Till's words, violence has left these cities wounded, scarred with memories of conflict in the cityscape. "This scarring changes things, places, and people irreversibly, and any conflict leaves potent traces in its wake, even after a city is rebuilt. These traces are both material and immaterial" (Drozdzewski et al. 2016, p.449). These traces can be seen if we pay attention, and they are certainly felt by those who live there. Thinking about memory in these cities through the spatial frame of the scape allows us to see how people can encounter places differently because of their personal experience. A memoryscape helps us to see lived memory as existing at

the point of connection between our environments our social and our embodied experiences. The environments in which we live are full of a myriad of memory sites and monuments alongside ephemeral interventions and embodied experiences. Our environments are blends of architectural, economic, demographic, emotional scapes. When we draw back from looking at memorials to take in their wider contexts and ways they are produced, we begin to see the complex connections between memory, space, people, and psyches. We see how memorials exist within dynamic environments, within the mobilities and movements of daily life, of searching, of protest, of fear, of resistance, of violence, and of creativity. Disappearance, specifically, is marked by an ambiguousness that makes it different to other types of absence. It haunts, it seeps, it is felt in the space of the city and in our bodies.

I will now, in the chapter that follows, turn to one specific example of memory work that is responding to the violence of the war on drugs and its criminalisation of victims, Bordando por la Paz y la Memoria (Embroidery for Peace and Memory). This is the project the members of FUNDENL were working towards, and in embroidering they rehumanise and restore identity to the disappeared and dead. Bordando por la Paz is a temporary intervention in public space, and to me constitutes part of the memoryscapes of the places where it is underway, but it is the slow processes of stitching collectively that is the site of a practice of memory and a process of transformation, re-building, and creativity.

Chapter 5: Bordando por la Paz y la Memoria

If we held a minute's silence for each person killed in this war we would be without words for 41 days. Silence. Silence. Silence.

Vanessa Job (2012, p.160)

In the previous two chapters I expanded out from monuments, museums, and memorials in public space, to ephemeral and temporary interventions, invisible and unmarked events, and to the haunting nature of places layered with absence. In Chapter 3 I focused on the politics of memory and of time, and how memorial actions can work to place unresolved crimes in the past and move on, or can resist the passage of linear time and fight to keep the disappeared and other victims in the present present. In Chapter 4 I put forward the concept of memoryscapes as a way to try to envisage what memory in environments really does and what living with it feels like, layered with the 'scapes' of war and daily life. In this present chapter, however, I want to examine a different kind of memorial in depth, one that is ongoing, collective, and dynamic: Bordando por la Paz y la Memoria (Embroidery for Peace and Memory). This is a memory project that works with a different temporality and velocity to the public memorials already discussed: one whose value lies in its process, a project which creates time and space to think and connect to those absent.

Many practices of memorialisation and academic literature about memory seem to lack an understanding of the sorts of emotions, transformations, and politics taking place in the process of creating and responding to violent environments. What is so often missed is that, more than any aesthetic, what is important in memory work is the process. By this I do not only mean the politics of the construction of a memorial, but to explore deeply how memory can be constructed, experienced, and shared through objects, how it is textured, what it feels like to watch a memorial materialise, how this transforms the makers and wider society, and what kinds of value is located in these actions. This is a way of seeing memory as work in progress, as something that can and does change, never complete, never resolved. In her 1985 book *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, Elaine Scarry suggests that a person in pain – and I suggest that the trauma and fear experienced when living in violent

environments is comparable here – is unable to communicate that pain due to the incapacity of language to express it and the lack of objects that represent it. She explains (1985, p.162), the "objectlessness [of pain], the complete absence of referential content, almost prevents it from being rendered in language: objectless, it cannot easily be objectified in any form, material or verbal". This of course has a politics, for if an experience cannot be verbally or materially represented then it struggles to be politically represented also.

One of the mechanisms of the war on drugs in Mexico has been to frame victims of violence as criminals, as somehow deserving of the violence, which in turn becomes an explanation for it and which negates the need to punish those responsible. This is the context in which Bordando por la Paz was created and is working against. There is a distinct lack of information about the victims of violence; government data on the numbers of people disappeared and killed is estimated to be much lower than actual figures, and thousands of the bodies of people who have been killed are reported as and often remain unidentified. Bodies are nameless, stripped of a connection to who they were and their place in society: there are now almost 35,000 unidentified bodies in public cemeteries and morgues (Animal Politico 2018). It is as if these thousands of people have come from nowhere, and their lives are not valuable, are not grievable (Butler 2006).

The criminalisation of victims has been created and represented in the media and in political discourse (Gibler 2012, p.139; Chávez Hernández 2018; Diéguez 2018; Olalde Rico 2018). Corrie Boudreaux (2016, p.391) explains, "In Mexico, death by violence is often a stigma, with victims presumed to have been "involved in something"...According to such circular reasoning, the dead deserved to die, and we know this because they are dead". This in turn feeds impunity: the deaths of these non-valuable lives are not worth punishing (Boudreaux 2016, p.395). This is the power of the "narco-machine", a term used by Rossana Reguilo (2011) to describe the mechanics of contemporary Mexican violence; it disarticulates, it fosters unintelligibility. Language is one medium through which the narco-machine works, and a new lexicon of *narcoñol* describes dead bodies, violent attacks, and criminal activity. *Narcoñol* creates a total enemy – the *narco* – and destroys our interpretive

systems. It produces the absurd dichotomy of the "good dead" and the "bad dead". Reguilo (2011, no page) explains:

> When there are no words to describe or name useless, surplus, brutal death, jargon is a pertinent instrument to both official powers and to the narco-machine. As long as the bodies do not transcend the category of "collateral damage," it is possible to set up a language that destructs its emergence as evidence of the limits of barbarism.

In the first years of the war on drugs the word *malos* (bad guys) appeared in everyday conversation to give some form to those responsible for, but also victims of, the violence, a word that not only criminalises but simplifies and obscures the state as a violent agent (Villarreal 2016, p.186). *Levantar* (to pick someone up) is used by the police and media in the place of *desaparecer* (to disappear), to insinuate criminal activity (Karl 2014a, p.14). At least part of the criminalisation of victims, and how this representation is expanded and repeated in society, is to create a myth, an explanation for the violence that allows others to continue with their lives, to believe in 'this happened for a reason' and so follows, 'this won't happen to me'. Ana Villarreal (2016, p.187) describes, "With this language victims are criminalised in order to justify violent acts that would otherwise show us our own vulnerability".

Visual representations of this violence circulate in everyday life in Mexico and are part of the narco-machine. Reguilo explains, "The dissolution of the person is the narco-machine's first victory" (2011, no page); dismembered bodies lose their singularity (their personhood in Edkins's (2011) terms) and become anonymous, broken bodies become abstract units (Diéguez 2016; Diéguez 2018). Stories about mutilated, decapitated, and disintegrated bodies in newspapers and on television is a daily occurrence (Robledo Silvestre 2014, p.12). The effect of these images and representations is of course not universal, but they can distance, they can foster "bemused awareness, continually restocked by photographic information, that terrible things happen" (Sontag 2003, p.12), and nothing more. These mechanisms of criminalisation and dehumanisation differentiate between those more and less human, but Judith Butler (2006, p.146) also demonstrates that sometimes these normative schemes, as she calls them, in fact work through providing no name, no image, and no narrative, "so that there never was a life and there never was a death".

As we saw in Chapter 1 of this thesis, Gabriel Gatti (2014, p.2-3) argues that disappearance creates a catastrophe of identity and language:

> Identities lose their footing and the ways of talking about them are forced to navigate uncharted waters. No, nothing fits: bodies are separated from identities; words are dissociated from things; identities without bodies and bodies without identities are born; and family relations are ruptured; what was normal cracks and is left without bearings.

The lack of data, lack of knowledge, and lack of comprehension of the scale of violent death and disappearance, obliterates the lives that these people had. This complete disruption to identity and language, to the disappeared person and the context from which they came, is of course an intentional outcome of disappearance, to remove the personhood from the person (Edkins 2011). It enables this violence to exist and to continue in silence with impunity.

In this chapter I will explore in depth Bordando por la Paz y la Memoria. This project, embroidering handkerchiefs dedicated to the victims of violence, began in Mexico City and spread across Mexico and internationally. Through it we can see some of the emotional processes underway in creative and collective responses to violence; how it fosters empathy and demonstrates care, re-humanises victims and restores their personhood, re-makes community and social fabric, and how it creates and represents a measure of time and velocity that is opposed to that of violence. This chapter looks in turn at three embroidery groups and how each developed the project in their differing contexts: Fuentes Rojas in Mexico City, who began this project to re-sensitise the public to the victims of violence across the country; Bordando por la Paz Puebla in Puebla, who turned to respond to the problem of femicide and gender violence in their state; and FUNDENL Bordamos por la Paz Nuevo León in Monterrey. The destruction of identity and personhood, the destruction of intelligibility and interpretive systems, and the destruction of bodies and their dehumanisation have framed violence in Mexico since 2006. And it is in this context that Bordando por la Paz y la Memoria can be understood. The project is an effort to sensitise, rehumanise, to name, to afford identity to the dead and disappeared, and brings them back into public space, and in so doing constructs community. Gatti

(2014, p.92) explains, "if forced disappearance of persons destroyed identities, resistance involves remaking them, reconstructing them from what remains".

Red threads: velocities of violence and remaking

I stitch letters, I stitch stories.
I stitch you and you stitch me, dead countryman...
I embrace you with thread and needle...
In this white cotton handkerchief, I hug your parents, your children, and your partner in life; I hug this hurting and broken Mexico
Beatriz Eugenia Andrade Iturribarría (cited in Gargallo Celentani 2014, p.51)

Across Mexico, several violent incidents marked 2011, and several citizen- and relative-led organisations and projects formed in response. The murder of Juan Francisco Sicilia Ortega in Cuernavaca, Morelos, explored in Chapter Four, was one such incident, and when the caravan of Movimiento por la Paz arrived to the centre of Mexico City, thousands of people had gathered there to protest against the government and show solidarity with the victims of violence, including the artist activist group Fuentes Rojas. That day they began a participatory public memorial to embroider handkerchiefs for people killed in the violence of the war on drugs, a handkerchief for every victim: Bordando por la Paz y la Memoria (Fuentes Rojas 2016). Soon after, they began embroidering on Sundays by the fountain Fuente de los Coyotes in the park Jardin Centenario in the Coyoacán neighbourhood in the south of the city, from 12 till 3pm. This is where I first met them, in November 2015, and from across the park recognised from photos the floating soft wall of handkerchiefs strung between trees in the warm afternoon breeze.

In this section I will explore the project Bordando por la Paz through this group in Mexico City. During my time in Mexico I joined Tania Andrade, Elia Andrade, and Regina Méndez of Fuentes Rojas on Sundays, to embroider and learn through these women how they developed the project and what it meant to them. But I also learned through my hands what embroidering memorials to unknown victims feels like as a process. This section introduces ideas that will be developed in the following two

sections, when I explore how this project has worked and what it has meant in other contexts. Bordando por la Paz was taken up in places beyond Mexico City, as it was shared on social media. Groups began in Puebla, Monterrey, Guadalajara, Cuernavaca, Cancún, Tijuana and others. Each group slightly adapted the project to their context; relatives of the disappeared developed the idea and began embroidering in green for those missing, to distinguish them from the dead and represent the hope they will return alive, and others began embroidering in pink and purple to distinguish cases of femicide and gender violence. Beyond Mexico, groups formed in Montreal, New York, Paris, Tokyo, and Barcelona to name a few. By 2012 around forty groups were embroidering regularly (Olalde Rico 2018).

Fuentes Rojas began Bordando por la Paz by embroidering the names of people who had been killed since 2006 using red thread on white handkerchiefs. The words generally follow the structure of naming the victim (if known) and then some details as to what happened to them, the date it happened, and where. Bordando por la Paz had two objectives: to rouse indignation in people who were not directly affected by the violence, and to register every single person who had been killed, regardless of who they were (Olalde Rico 2018). An additional goal they were working towards was to create a citizen memorial to those killed in the war on drugs that could be displayed in the centre of Mexico City on 1 December 2012, President Felipe Calderón's last day in office, which would make visible the consequences of his militarisation policy (Daly Goggin 2014; Olalde Rico 2018).

In 2010, a separate citizen-led response to the violence had begun. A blog called Menos Días Aquí (Fewer Days Here) was set up to count, weekly, people violently killed in Mexico (Menos Días Aquí 2018). A network of 'counters' across Mexico read the *notas rojas*, the crime pages of local newspapers, and uploaded details of murders in their area and state (Ruse 2015). Fuentes Rojas used Menos Días Aquí as a database of cases to embroider, and the detached language of the reporting found its way onto the handkerchiefs: "Cispín Frías Guardado murdered while he was driving on avenue Acueductor, in the neighbourhood Jardines del Valle in Zapopan. Guadalajara, Jalisco. 28/January/2011" (Figure 25). Often very little information is reported and bodies are unidentified: "Rest in peace, man who was executed and then

thrown from a moving car, near the neighbourhood Villa Fontana, in Tijuana, Baja California North, on 16/03/11" (Figure 26).

Figure 25: Handkerchief commemorating Cispín Frías Guardado from Bordando por la Paz.

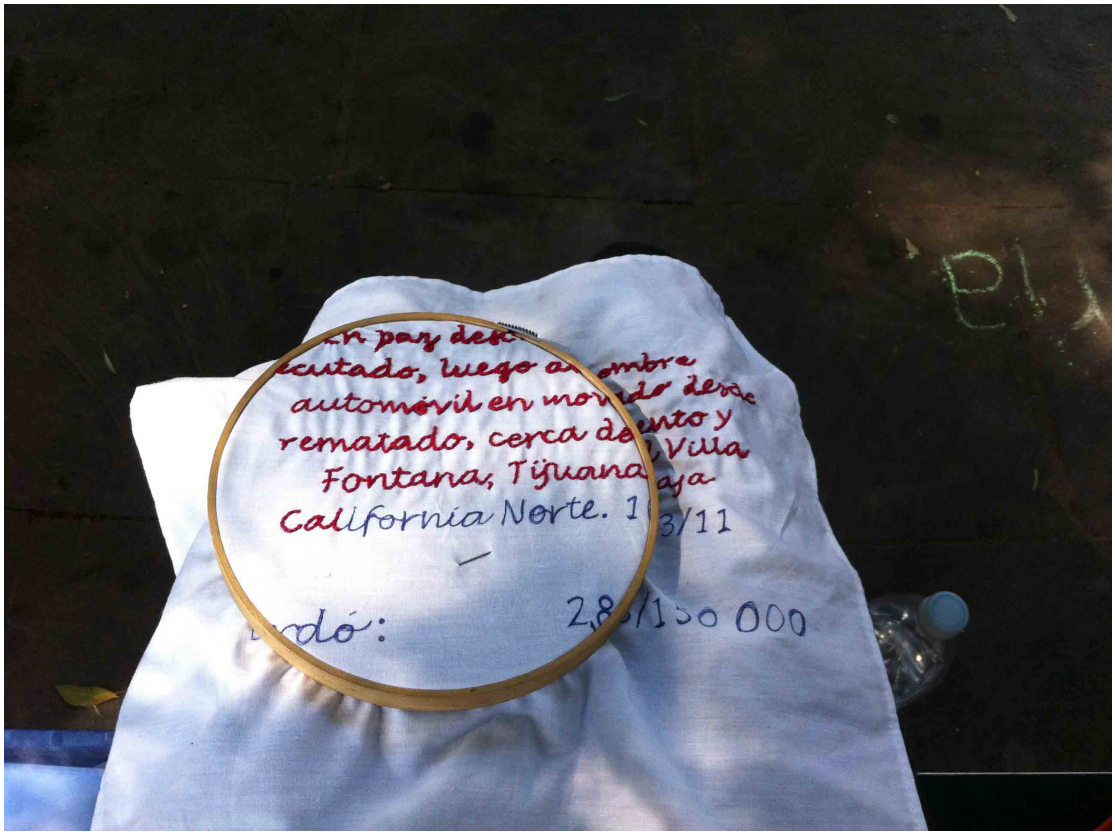

Figure 26: Handkerchief commemorating unnamed man from Bordando por la Paz.

The plaza where they meet is in an old neighbourhood with cobbled tree-lined streets popular with tourists and families on the weekends, and the plaza is shady and laid out with shrubbery and winding paths. The group set up around a couple of benches and string a hanging wall of *pañuelos* (handkerchiefs) between trees behind the benches. Here they are, week after week, and people join them to embroider and discuss Mexico's social problems and the project (Figure 27). To participate in Bordando por la Paz skill and experience with embroidery is not necessary. Each week Fuentes Rojas bring several handkerchiefs prepared and ready to be embroidered. They bring hoops, thread and needles, and anyone who passes by and wants to join in is welcome to do so. Some people stitch a few letters and others stay for the entire session. People can ask questions and find out what the project is about, or participate for the enjoyment of taking a few minutes to sit down and use their hands. Several different people can, therefore, complete one handkerchief over various sessions. The impact of these many hands is visible in the different stitch styles and varying levels of skill, different shades of red thread, and the names of the embroiderers are often recorded on the bottom of the handkerchief. Other times

people arrive with handkerchiefs already completed, made at home for the project. The handkerchiefs are not kept or owned by their makers, they become part of the collective. To Fuentes Rojas, creating embroideries of high quality is not important; instead, the focus is on having a conversation and connection with people in public space (Fuentes Rojas 2016). For these reasons the project challenges capitalist rationality and the objectives of productivity, competition, and ownership (Olalde Rico 2018).

Figure 27: Bordando por la Paz y la Memoria, Fuentes Rojas, Mexico City.

Occupying public space is key to Bordando por la Paz. In her book documenting the project, Francesca Gargallo Celentani (2014, p.51) explains, "In a country where the phrase you hear most often is "now you can't leave the house", to embroider in public space is revolutionary". Initially, Fuentes Rojas considered making the project more clandestine, but after the first event with the caravan of Movimiento por la Paz they realised it had to be public (Fuentes Rojas 2016). Public space enables conversation, interaction, and confrontation; public space is social space. Embroidering in plazas across the country is a form of occupation, a re-entering of the public sphere, and a

way of building community, an act of repairing torn social fabric (Gargallo Celentani 2014, p.51). On a Sunday afternoon the park where Fuentes Rojas embroider is full of people. Week after week I saw entertainers, street vendors selling food and crafts, musicians and families, elderly people and children, locals and tourists, greet the project with a whole range of responses as they passed by. Some barely notice, others read the handkerchiefs, others think they are for sale. After asking about the project I watched one woman become visibly upset, and she grabbed a handkerchief and began embroidering with anger, urgency, and desperation. Some people ask questions, and others are more hostile, but this is what placing interventions in public space can enable; it can disrupt and confront, make social encounters and conversations.

This project works as a counter to the narco-machine. Regina Méndez of Fuentes Rojas (cited in Gargallo Celentani 2014, p.53) explains, "One serious problem currently with constructing a conscious public is that the majority of people killed in Mexico have lost their names in the oblivion that this crime constructs". Confusion, and lack of information, is part of the strategy of repression. Violence terrorises, and terror serves to silence people. The terror is internalised by all of us, by everyone who sees mutilated bodies on the front of newspapers day after day after day. Bordando por la Paz speaks about this violence publicly with empathy and emotion, naming the victims and challenging the dominant discourse of criminalisation. Gargallo Celentani (2014, p.81) explains, "Terror constrains collective life, it paralyses expressions of solidarity and affection. To get together to embroider, to speak, to be close to others, then, is a challenge to terror, and is a way to reconstruct collective courage and to act for peace". Bordando challenges the silence and isolation, mechanisms that destroy social fabric. Sharing the stories of the *people* who are the victims of violence builds community and humanises, and stitching their names connects us to that individual who is otherwise lost in the narco-machine.

Bordando por la Paz aims to embroider a handkerchief for every victim (Fuentes Rojas 2016). A handkerchief for each person killed in the war on drugs, whether police officers or soldiers, cartel member or, as are the vast majority, non-involved citizens. The distinction of victims (the good and the bad) is part of the discourse that divides society, part of the narco-machine that explains the deaths as somehow deserved. In Mexico City most of the victims were unknown to the embroiderers but,

through embroidering and naming them, their identities and personhoods are in some small way restored and they are re-entered, literally, back into society (Edkins 2011; Gatti 2014). This project is about publicly rejecting the idea of collateral damage, to demonstrate through time and effort that these lives are grievable and missed. Again, doing this in public space is key: the act of grieving and commemorating these deaths and disappearances in public says that this violence was not a private event and reserved for private grief, but caused by social and political conditions, and should therefore be grieved publicly (Boudreaux 2016, p.396), and dealt with by punitive bodies. The embroiderers are making the political decision to understand the situation in Mexico in this way, to resist being divided, to see that all victims, even the *malos*, are produced by structural violences.

The handkerchiefs themselves are delicate to see hanging and to touch. As an object they are everyday, homely, and familial. They are intimate, held about our persons to comfort us, to wipe and clean us. They are often personalised, embroidered with initials marking who they belong to. And they speak to other gendered textile responses to violence in Latin America, such as the embroidered headscarves worn by the Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, representing their missing children's nappies (Taylor 1997); the *arpilleras* of Chile made by the relatives of detained and disappeared persons that depicted scenes of violence and everyday life (Agosín 2011, p.xiv); and the tapestries and quilts of the Mujeres Tejiendo Sueños y Sabores de Paz (Women Weaving Dreams and Flavours of Peace) who were violently displaced from Mampuján, Colombia (Mujeres Tejiendo Sueños y Sabores de Paz 2018), amongst many others. These feminist responses to violent experiences consciously draw on their gendered positionality, exploring creative ways to respond to and reconstruct the destruction of their worlds.

As well as a sense of touch and comfort, and the re-humanising effect of the stitched words, the handkerchiefs capture an element of temporality and velocity. When Fuentes Rojas began the project they numbered the handkerchiefs in the bottom right corner or below the text. The examples I have already given (Figures 25 and 26) are numbers 1697/80,000 and 2828/150,000. The first number is the number of handkerchiefs; the second number is the number of people killed since the war on drugs began at the end of 2006, according to government data. The growth of this

figure is visible in the handkerchiefs hung in the plaza each week, with the earliest handkerchiefs testifying to 40,000 deaths. Each time the government released data on violent murders the handkerchiefs represented the rise: 40,000, 50,000, 60,000, 80,000, 90,000, 100,000, 150,000, and 167,000 on the handkerchiefs that were being embroidered during my time there. Tania Andrade from Fuentes Rojas explained to me how they have observed the comparatively much slower growth of the number of handkerchiefs they complete. She explained that to her, what is captured in these numbers is speed, velocity. The slow velocity of the time it takes to embroider handkerchiefs by hand, stitch by stitch, compared to the speed in which life can be destroyed. An embroiderer from the group in Cuernavaca speaks to this, explaining, "To embroider is the opposite of shooting, it doesn't create a rush of adrenaline nor a loud noise, but instead enables the stillness needed to overcome pain" (Clarck West cited in Gargallo Celentani 2014, p.97).

Underlying these different velocities is the unlikelihood of achieving one of the aims of the project: *cada víctima un pañuelo* – a handkerchief for every victim. The embroidering and creation, the making, will perhaps never catch up with the violence and death, even more so when we think of the insufficient data and information on the victims of violence, and that we may never know the true number and identities of all the victims. The task is practically impossible, almost unimaginable. But this is not a problem, and there is no rush to reach the goal, to finish the project. Because what Bordando por la Paz is about and where its value lies is the process. It does not matter to embroider cases systematically, it does not matter that across the country there are several handkerchiefs for each of the forty-three Ayotzinapa students, and that they do not know which cases have been embroidered and which have not. This again defies our dominant capitalist frames of logic. The success of Bordando por la Paz is not in any end goal, but in the transformation and affect that takes place while making. It is in the sense of achievement someone has, in the feeling of participation, the feeling of community, in the acknowledgement of these grievable lives. This could be an example of what Scarry discusses; embroidering handkerchiefs for the victims of violence, assigning identities, naming, and rehumanising, is a process of remaking the world after the destruction brought about by violence. This process transforms the external world and the makers themselves. The value is in the creation of an ongoing archive of the violence, making something material for people who are intentionally

obscured and forgotten, which is then able to travel and speak, to testify and to evidence.

After embroidering on a different handkerchief each week, one Sunday I arrived and was handed a handkerchief that had not yet been started. It said:

> José Benito de la O, 24 years old, along with 4 other young people all from San Vicente beach who were returning from the port of Veracruz, was disappeared, after being detained by a group of state police.
> Tierra Blanca, Veracruz, 11/January/2016.

I was glad to have the opportunity to embroider a handkerchief from start to finish, to pass every stitch through the cloth, and this was the first time I had embroidered in green for someone who was disappeared. Instead of leaving this handkerchief with Fuentes Rojas, I kept hold of it and worked on it at the Sunday sessions, but also at home, on buses, and when with friends. I used a tiny stitch, starting something that would take me hours, and decorated it with a red crochet flower a friend had made and stitched on green leaves. On my last Sunday in Mexico I went to the plaza and finished it with the group. The process of embroidering this handkerchief felt like I was doing something useful, and it came to life as the trace of the words in pen was replaced by beautiful green thread. Cordelia Rizzo, an embroiderer from Monterrey, shared with me how she feels when she finishes a handkerchief. To her it is a special moment, feeling a sense of achievement, that you have done something, contributed something, in this context in which you feel so impotent most of the time (Rizzo 2016). An embroiderer in Ciudad Juárez made a similar comment, seeing her efforts to recover the humanity of victims through embroidering as her small contribution to the recovery of the city (Boudreaux 2016, p.410). You have contributed to something social, something collective, in a context where these connections are intentionally being destroyed. I hung the *pañuelo* for José Benito on the string of handkerchiefs displayed each week in the plaza, and I know each week it will be there, present, claiming space and denouncing his disappearance, even when I am not (Figure 28).

Figure 28: Handkerchief for José Benito de la O.

Over the time I spent embroidering with Fuentes Rojas on Bordando por la Paz y la Memoria in Mexico City, I developed with the process. I improved at embroidering, learnt new techniques, and made friends. But my relation to the project and how it affected me developed too. I found when I began to embroider with the project I felt sadness and desperation and empathy so strongly, absorbing some of the pain of the violence into my body through my hands, getting to know these individual victims. Touching the handkerchiefs was charged with connection to those missing. But as the weeks passed I became somehow accustomed to it, the balance shifted and I spent less time speaking and thinking about the project and the victims of violence, and more time thinking strategically about what I could do to contribute next, organising events to bring the *pañuelos* to the UK, and building friendships. This was not a process of desensitisation nor overcoming and moving on from trauma, but the remaking of the world that Scarry discusses. Through embroidering over months with these women I began to understand what a project like Bordando does; how slow making with hands, stitching and weaving community, slowing down, are a process that helps people understand their context and their position within it, make both social and analytical

connections, and find space to construct the community they want and need. Embroidering had transformed the external world, it had connected to people and created community, but it had also transformed me.

Leaving finished (or half finished) handkerchiefs to the collective is an important element of Bordando por la Paz; to give back something that you have created, to put time, effort, and care into something that was never meant to be owned or stored away but to have a life of its own. The handkerchiefs are taken on protests and marched through the city, and on certain days and for certain events they embroider in other places. As mentioned, one of the initial aims of the project was for all the groups to bring their handkerchiefs together in Mexico City on the 1 December 2012, to visibilise the human cost of President Calderón's war on drugs, part of a general protest taking place that day. Various Bordando por la Paz groups had been coordinating plans for months including with police and officials, and embroiderers were travelling from all over the country as well as from Córdoba in Argentina, coming together in person for the first time (Fuentes Rojas 2016). They hung more than 2,500 handkerchiefs along Avenida Juárez in the centre of Mexico City (Borrás 2016). Members from several groups who were present that day described it to me as beautiful, emotional but positive; the community they had constructed came together to denounce the government. But something turned. Some protestors, who were not connected to Bordando por la Paz, arrived with Molotov cocktails and sticks, and were met by riot police (Aroche and Arellano 2012). The embroiderers were caught in the middle and ran in different directions to shelter. In the chaos the *pañuelos* were gathered but many were lost and all were mixed up, covered in dirt, and some stained with blood. But more than physical damage was the emotional impact of this violence for those that were there. The event transformed from a space of peaceful strength to violence and chaos in a few moments, and, it seems to me through listening to accounts of this day, that it felt like an attack on the community they had been constructing, on the social fabric they had been stitching.

Bordando por la Paz is a project which works to sensitise the public against the criminalising and dehumanising narratives of the war on drugs. It claims public space for the victims and shows how actions such as this can be a small part of the remaking of the world, not to replicate the world that was destroyed, but to create one based on

different assumptions and values. The velocity of remaking is much slower than that of violence, captured in the numbers of handkerchiefs and persons killed, and I spoke of my experiences of embroidering over weeks and months. The ideas explored here will now be seen in two other groups who participate in Bordando por la Paz but, as we will see, these groups took the essence of the idea and developed it to speak and respond to their own contexts. Fuentes Rojas in Mexico City began a project that was a citizen response from the capital city to violence taking place nationwide. As we progress through the next two examples, we will see an increase in the intimacy of the process of embroidering between the embroiderers and the victims, moving from embroidering cases of people killed and disappeared nationwide, to cases of femicide within one state, to people embroidering handkerchiefs for their disappeared relatives.

Pink and purple threads: an archive of gender violence

because embroidering we are all equal.
embroidering we recognise ourselves in the other.
embroidering we connect with victims.
embroidering we regenerate social fabric.
embroidering we transform ourselves.
Bordando por la Paz Puebla (cited in Gargallo Celentani 2014, p.91)

A few hours to the south east of Mexico City where the country's iconic volcanoes are located is the city of Puebla, a colonial-era city famous for cathedrals and architecture, but which has sprawled in recent decades to become one of the largest cities in Mexico, with an industrial economy. After initially contributing some handkerchiefs to Fuentes Rojas in Mexico City, a group of people came together and Bordando por la Paz Puebla began to embroider in public on 19 August 2012 in the Plaza de la Democracia in the centre of the city. They mirrored the meetings in Mexico City and went out every Sunday from 12 till 3pm, and by the time of the event on 1 December in Mexico City they had completed around 400 handkerchiefs (Borrás 2016). After some time embroidering with Fuentes Rojas, I wanted to understand how the project worked and had unfolded in other places. In Puebla I found a group of people engaging with an issue in their community and raising

awareness of it. In Puebla I was also able to get a sense of Bordando as an archive, and listen to stories of the victims, the handkerchiefs, and the embroiderers.

Bordando por la Paz Puebla was made up of artists, activists, and journalists, and feminist and LGBTQ groups began to integrate with them, inspired to respond to societal problems through this project. Rosa Borrás, a founding member of the group whom I visited in Puebla twice, believes the project came into their lives at a time when they were all looking for a way to express their anger through peaceful and positive protest. Large crowds of often more than thirty attended the Sunday embroidering sessions, and the group put emphasis on explaining and communicating to the public what they were doing. Rosa recalled that all sorts of people began to participate: older women who for many reasons tend not to go on marches but still want to express their indignation and sympathy, children, street vendors, performers and musicians, and sometimes tourists. She described it as "like a party every Sunday, but a way of finding and reaching empathy" (Borrás 2016). Like Fuentes Rojas in Mexico City, they created a positive space of community and connection, however after the event in Mexico City in December 2012 the group fell apart somewhat. The violence of that day deeply affected them, and in that moment they could not see the way to take the project forward. Some members also began to receive intimidation and threats (Borrás 2016). Being in the centre of a smaller city, Bordando por la Paz Puebla had greater visibility than Fuentes Rojas in Mexico City, so after what happened in December 2012 they stopped embroidering weekly in public.

Rosa took me to the Plaza de la Democracia where they embroidered every Sunday for that short but productive and intense period. The plaza itself is quite small, more like a pedestrianised street people pass through, which is in fact one of the reasons they chose it, and that it is shaded (Figure 29). They originally embroidered in front of the hotel in the plaza but, after it complained, moved a little further along in front of a teachers' union, from whom they sought permission to use the space. The union was happy for them to hang handkerchiefs from the railings in front of its windows, and they used the public benches and brought stools and chairs to the plaza (Borrás 2016). They embroidered opposite a baroque church and would catch the crowd as people spilled out after Sunday mass. Standing in the plaza with Rosa I could sense it, here

where it all took place. A trace had lingered on; how it moved people, how it brought people together in their pain.

In Puebla, the group had taken the Bordando project in directions that responded to their own context. After initially working with the database that Fuentes Rojas had coordinated for the Bordando por la Paz project, embroidering nationwide cases of homicide, the group decided to focus their work on local cases in the state of Puebla, with a particular focus on victims of femicide, which they embroidered in pink and purple. Stood there in the plaza, Rosa explained that she was now, in the spring of 2016, ready to embroider once more. The problem of femicide and gender violence has been increasing, and a group of them wanted to visibilise this by embroidering a handkerchief for each femicide in the state of Puebla in 2016. They wanted to do it in public but insecurity had stopped them: "there is much more repression than there was", she explained. For the rest of 2016 and into 2017, embroidering in cafés, homes, and in university classrooms, the group embroidered handkerchiefs for the eighty-two women murdered in 2016 (Borrás 2018).

Figure 29: La Plaza de la Democracia, Puebla.

In Rosa's studio we spent time looking through the electronic database used by the group to keep a log of handkerchiefs to embroider and handkerchiefs that are complete. This is another archive, another space created in the process of Bordando por la Paz that records and remembers the victims. Like Fuentes Rojas, Rosa originally used Menos Días Aquí to find cases to embroider, but when the group turned to local cases she researched them in the local news. Rosa and the others in the group find out who the victims were and what happened to them, and try to find something about who they were as a person before their life was destroyed and they were dehumanised: before they lost their identity and personhood. This is part of the process of connection that an embroiderer feels for those they name, and can be a very painful process, one that takes a lot of emotional energy. The group's project to embroider for each femicide of 2016 exemplified this: they checked the *notas rojas* weekly; they counted and recorded the murder of women life by life, death by death.

In her studio we sat and read and touched hundreds of handkerchiefs and discussed the stories they tell. On 1 December 2012, amongst the chaos that unfolded, Bordando por la Paz Puebla rescued almost 2000 *pañuelos* that came from all of the groups, mixed up, trampled, and dirty. In the months that followed they attempted to organise and return these, but some were never identified and claimed, and so she has the hundreds embroidered in Puebla as well as others from that day. To sit with an enormous pile of handkerchiefs, to touch them and read them one after another after another, is a different experience to seeing them blowing in the breeze of a plaza claiming public space and for the personhood of the victims to be recognised (Figure 30). Some of the handkerchiefs that had been on Avenida Juárez in December 2012 are splattered with dried blood. In their materiality, traces of the lives of these handkerchiefs as objects can be felt and seen. And reading them together in the studio, the majority of which were local cases, was intimate because I heard the stories behind each victim, the handkerchief itself, and its embroiderer.

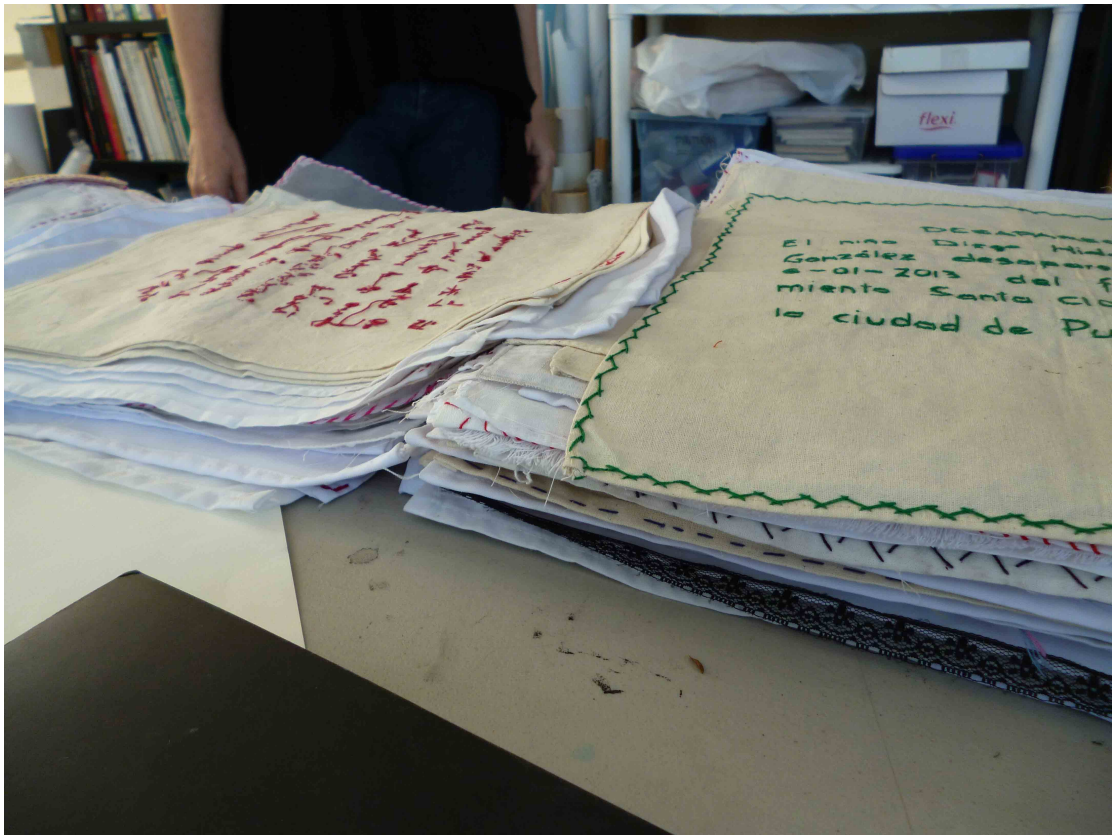

Figure 30: Piles of handkerchiefs in the studio of Rosa Borrás.

While the group embroidered in the Plaza de la Democracia, people passing through would approach them and share stories of those they had lost. Others would recognise their relatives and friends embroidered on the handkerchiefs and approach and speak to the embroiderers (Borrás 2016). Rosa shared these stories with me as we sat and touched the handkerchiefs. There was a handkerchief for thirteen-year-old Guadalupe Betzarí Rendón, who was raped and beaten to death by her neighbours. One day, when the group was embroidering in the plaza, a man who shines shoes approached them after watching them for hours. He told them about his niece, Guadalupe, and how the family had tried to report the crime to the police, but the perpetrators had bribed them so were not arrested. A member of Bordando wrote down some words about Guadalupe to embroider. Her rape and murder never made it to the news, her case is not included in statistics, but it is here, embroidered. Her uncle came back to the plaza the following week to see this handkerchief and it made him happy to see her there, acknowledged and named. They have not seen him since (Borrás 2016).

There was a handkerchief for Irma Flores and her two daughters aged four and six, whose case had deeply upset Rosa. Irma's boyfriend killed them; he beat them and flayed their faces. She was twenty, and he, six days short of turning eighteen when he committed the crime, was given the maximum sentence for a minor: seven years in a youth offenders institute. He killed Irma and her daughters to rise up the ranks of a gang, to prove himself, and an accomplice filmed it all (Zócalo 2012; Borrás 2016). One handkerchief stood out that had been embroidered in green on translucent white organza for Ignacio Pérez Rodríguez, who disappeared on 17 August 2012: it looked different to the rest. It was embroidered by a woman called Lala, the elderly mother of one of the group in Puebla. She wanted to participate by embroidering at home, but asked for a case of a disappeared person. She could not bring herself to embroider for someone who had been killed; she needed to embroider for hope (Borrás 2016; Borrás 2018). She has now passed away, but her handkerchief continues in the material world.

Bordando por la Paz Puebla focused their embroidering on one aspect of violence that affects their community: gender violence. Spending time with these archives – the electronic database and the piles of handkerchiefs, hours of work materialised – allowed intimate stories about the victims, handkerchiefs, and makers to be shared. As in Mexico City, the project sensitises, restores personhood and reveals connections in the sharing of these stories. In the Plaza de la Democracia and the studio these stories and memories came alive and the community this process had created became clear.

Green threads: a will to care

> *She embroiders your name and loving words so that the wind will take them to wherever you are, so that you remember that she will not stop until she finds you. Now she is not afraid, do not worry: she told me that her fear has transformed into rage and strength to locate you*
>
> Denise Márquez and Angélica Ávila (2016, p.53)

As we have seen in Puebla, the basic concept of Bordando por la Paz can materialise in different ways and have different meaning for those involved. This project that

began in Mexico City can be adapted and join its network, which has become a supportive community. In the city of Monterrey in the state of Nuevo León, North-East Mexico, a city we saw in Chapters 3 and 4, a group of embroiderers came together with a necessity that marks it apart from Mexico City and Puebla. The association of relatives of the disappeared Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Nuevo León (FUNDENL, United Forces for Our Disappeared in Nuevo León), came together and established themselves through Bordando por la Paz. They occupied public space at a time when people were afraid to be on the streets, and embroidered handkerchiefs for their disappeared relatives and other victims. Like Fuentes Rojas and Bordando por la Paz Puebla, they constructed community and social fabric, they rehumanised and sensitised, but through the handkerchiefs they also connected with their absent children, and showed love and care for them through embroidering.

Roy Rivera, the son of Irma Leticia Hidalgo (Letty), was disappeared on 11 January 2011. In her first months of searching for him Letty met other relatives of disappeared persons and victims of violence, and they began protesting in the Plaza Zaragoza, the traditional plaza at the end of the Macroplaza described in Chapter 4, on Thursday afternoons. In front of the Cathedral and the Palacio Municipal, they communicated with the public face-to-face to tell their personal stories of the violence, which countered the criminalising narratives of the state and media (Ochoa Treviño 2016, p.142). Letty came across the project Bordando por la Paz on social media, and decided to bring equipment so they could embroider handkerchiefs for their missing relatives at this Thursday reunion. But, rather than use red thread, they would embroider in green to represent the hope they have for the disappeared to return home. She brought along hoops, needles, and thread, and they held their first embroidery session during Easter week 2012 (Hidalgo 2016a). Others who had seen her messages on social media arrived with their own needles and thread, ready to join in, and from that day they returned each week; a group of relatives of the disappeared and people who accompanied them "visibilised the tragedy that had disrupted the lives of thousands of families" (Ochoa Treviño 2016, p.141).

The group used a bandstand that provided shelter and shade – *kiosko* Lucila Sabella in the centre of the square – as their place to embroider and to display their

handkerchiefs. For four months they met on Thursdays, and then switched to Sundays like the groups in Mexico City, Puebla, and elsewhere, but met from 5 till 8pm to avoid the heat of the afternoon. They occupied public space at a moment when many in Monterrey were avoiding it due to insecurity. Bordamos por la Paz Nuevo León reclaimed public space, and in so doing social life, from fear, panic, and silence. On occasion they heard the sound of gunshots nearby (Hidalgo 2016a) but they constructed a space where, at least for those few hours, they felt at peace (Rizzo 2016). In the plaza they could communicate with the public, they could change the criminalising discourse and show people who their children really were (Ramírez Atilano 2015, no page). Letty explained, "We want people to not forget that there are *desaparecidos*, that many people have died. We want anyone passing by here to see the handkerchiefs and find out, to know what happens" (quoted in Gargallo Celentani 2014, p.94/95).

Letty explained to me that embroidering handkerchiefs for their children and forming Bordamos por la Paz Nuevo León came at a time when she was feeling lost, struggling with how to move forward with her search for Roy. In the end it was through embroidering as a group that they decided to found FUNDENL and work together as an organisation in their searches for the disappeared (Hidalgo 2016). At their Bordamos reunions each person would share the research and progress in their searches they had made that week, to pool resources and experience. They brought newspaper clippings, made a database of information, and decided together how and when to approach state agencies and other sources for information (Gargallo Celentani 2014, p.95). This brought them together and out of individual struggles, to a place where, after nine months, they had become a group. Embroidering was a process that helped them to make sense of the situation they found themselves in: parents whose children had been disappeared, citizens who were engulfed in violence in a city they no longer recognised, at a speed their bodies and emotions could not catch up with, living in an altered geographical and temporal reality. Every stitch slowed the thought process down, and helped them to find strength, common purpose, and community.

Cordelia Rizzo embroidered with the group during these months, and she showed me around the plaza and the bandstand. It was a warm midweek evening and the plaza

was busy with people enjoying the cooler moment of the day. Cordelia showed me which benches they sat on, which part of the bandstand they occupied, how they hung their strings of handkerchiefs from one end to the other, and which trees they used on the occasions when the bandstand was being used by others (Figure 31). Her memories materialised in front of my eyes as she described them, and I could sense how it felt to embroider here together, similar to what I knew in Mexico City, but with an urgency to understand a trauma that was so much more personal, a violence which was so much closer, than what I knew. Cordelia reflected, "the first month we embroidered was beautiful" (Rizzo 2016). Thinking back to those months is an active process of comprehending how as citizens they were thrown into such (ongoing) violence, and how by embroidering they kept their heads above the water. It kept them all from drowning in isolated pools. It connected them. Anthropologist Carolyn Nordstrom (1997, p.217) has argued, "if violence is made, it can be unmade as well". The space, creativity, and productivity of embroidering enabled them to process some of the violence and grief.

Figure 31: *Kiosko* Lucila Sabella, Plaza Zaragoza, Monterrey.

What makes these handkerchiefs different from Mexico City and Puebla is that they were made for someone the embroiderer knew intimately, often a parent for a disappeared child (Figure 32). Through embroidery members of FUNDENL connect to their children. Letty (quoted in Gargallo Celentani 2014, p.95) described, through the handkerchiefs "we hugged them, we kissed them, and we cried into these handkerchiefs...when we embroider it's as if we were with them, as if we were accompanying them". Cordelia explained that in the absence of the person the handkerchief can, for now, represent them (Rizzo 2016). In this context, then, embroidering is a process of taking care of those missing. The qualities of cloth and embroidery – of family and home – are present in the handkerchiefs; the materiality of them matters. And the time, energy, thoughts, and tears spent in the process of making, stitching letter by letter, word by word, is a way to demonstrate love and care to and for those missing. Elaine Scarry (1985, p.307) explains how a coat-maker is perhaps less interested in making a coat, but in making someone warm. She follows that this made thing, this artifact, then has the power to affect the sentience of the maker in turn. Letty explained the relatives welcomed Bordamos with joy, "because the messages and the company we gave to our loved ones through a handkerchief changed our mood for the positive, and we shared our love and care for [our children] in each handkerchief" (quoted in Gargallo Celentani 2014, p.95). In the absence of someone you love, when feeling helpless, embroidering cloth is an active process of looking after, of caring for those absent. Putting time and energy into making something beautiful for someone, something they will see when they return home, is a demonstration of love. And taking care takes time. It is a slow process of making, of reconstructing the world in the middle of destruction, and it transforms you in turn.

Figure 32: Handkerchief made by Leticia Hidalgo for her son Roy Rivera.

As in Mexico City and Puebla, in Monterrey embroidering handkerchiefs was a process of rehumanisation and of claiming these lives as grievable. Cordelia explained to me how she thinks the handkerchiefs create a "will to care"; that this object can personalise this conflict against a dominant discourse that has stripped victims of their identities to create emotional distance, to stop us caring. For Letty, embroidering handkerchiefs makes portraits of the victims, shows them as people with histories and families who love them (Hidalgo 2016a). And this is reflected in the text they use. The FUNDENL handkerchiefs tend to have fewer details of the violence – the disappearance or murder – and more information about that person, details of what they like or enjoy, and who is missing them (Figure 32). In her book *Aftermath*, Susan Brison describes the disintegration of the self experienced by victims of violence, which challenges our notions of personal identity (Brison 2002, p.4). Here the victims, those transformed by violence, are both the people who have been disappeared *and* their relatives. Bordamos por la Paz Nuevo León reassigned identity to the embroiderers' children who had been dismissed as collateral damage, and the process worked towards remaking the embroiderers themselves. They used

thread, needles, and hoops to sensitise the population (Ochoa Treviño 2016, p.143), and through it they found strength, they built community, and mended some of the torn social fabric of their city.

After those nine months the group stopped their weekly embroidering; they had taken from it what they needed and were ready to move forwards in a collective search for the disappeared as FUNDENL, which will be explored in Chapter 8. Bordamos por la Paz is still something they turn to on occasions when they need to find space and energy, however they now embroider in the Plaza de los Desaparecidos (Chapters 3 and 4) rather than the *kiosko* of the Plaza Zaragoza (Hidalgo 2016a). In embroidering, this group in Monterrey found a way to tell their own personal narratives of the victims who were criminalised in public discourse, drawing portraits of the disappeared and rejecting fear to find space to process what they were living through. As objects these handkerchiefs contain intimacy and the hope that those who are missed will return to see this work. And through embroidering at that moment these relatives came together to approach their searches and investigations collectively; they are remaking their world in a new mould.

Conclusions

The project Bordando por la Paz y la Memoria visibilises the victims of violence – of disappearance and murder and femicide – and names them, reassigns them identity, restores personhood: precisely the things that are taken away from victims in the criminalising and dehumanising narratives of the war on drugs. This is not memory work that seeks to reconcile and fix a narrative of the past, but embroidering a handkerchief is a process of taking care, of expressing empathy, a slow re-making of the world and society, and a transformation of the makers themselves. Those who participate and embroider, who take time to stitch and care for the victims connect to those absent. Feelings of fear and disconnection transform into a community, and social fabric is woven around. Bordando allows the materiality of the handkerchiefs in their softness and delicacy to be experienced, for the sensation of touch to be noticed, and through this connect to family and homeliness.

These three groups demonstrate how, taking the essence of the project, Bordando has had different meanings and enabled differing responses in each context. Fuentes Rojas began this project in Mexico City embroidering to show solidarity, express grief for those lost to violence, and denounce the government. This is a project to recognise every victim, a declaration that everyone is grievable. The group in Puebla began this way and then came to understand and connect with the specific gendered violence happening in their state. They made themselves present in their city and listened to its stories. And in Monterrey the relatives of FUNDENL found in embroidering a way to process the destruction of their worlds and enable them to come together to search for the disappeared. But this was also a deeply intimate process of taking care of missing children when living with their absence.

Embroidering the names and identities of the victims of violence is an act that reaches out, that connects, and reveals our relationality to those around us. It does not function within a productivist or individualised logic. The value in this project is not in reaching the goal of a handkerchief for every victim, but in working collectively, and in being creative in the context of the destruction of our interpretive systems and the narco-machine. And the speed at which this happens is slow; it is a painstaking engagement to embroider a material object, creating an object with love and care, because it is at the slow speed of making with hands that reconstruction of community takes place, which counters the velocity of the destruction of life. Disappearance and murder destroy families, homes, and communities, and in the process of embroidering trust, relationships, and society are re-built. Creativity creates space to think. Bordando por la Paz is not about overcoming trauma, but living with it, and producing new relations with the world that are opposite to those that produce disappearance, violence, and trauma in the first place.

Making is connecting, both connecting with other people in the process, including the dead and disappeared, and because the things we make go out into the world. Handkerchiefs are exchanged between groups within Mexico and around the world, and are lent to exhibitions and events that maintain their essence of denouncing and testifying. Handkerchiefs from FUNDENL in Monterrey were included in the Victoria and Albert Museum's 2014 exhibition *Disobedient Objects* in London (V&A 2018); while I embroidered with Fuentes Rojas, they took 500 handkerchiefs to New

York where they were displayed in the pop-up *Museum of Drug Policy*, a fringe event during the 2016 UN General Assembly Special Session on Drugs (Fuentes Rojas 2016; Museum of Drug Policy 2018); and handkerchiefs from these three groups were lent to me to be part of the exhibition *Stitched Voices* in the Aberystwyth Arts Centre in 2017 which I co-organised (Stitched Voices 2018).

These Bordando por la Paz groups are part of the memoryscapes of these cities; they made the disappeared and dead present in public space and in so doing intervened in the paths of other people's lives. However, this is now a turning point in the thesis, from chapters and projects that have represented, made present, and restored personhood to the disappeared, to focus on relatives of the disappeared, their actions, and their politics, for the rest of the thesis. In Chapter 6 we will see the ideas of memory and our environments taken forward, but into more intimate and private spaces, rituals, and objects, rather than those for public conversation. Chapters 7 and 8 then build on this, exploring how relatives translate and communicate their experiences and to examine their searches for the disappeared.

Chapter 6: The Presence of Absence

To live means to leave traces. In the interior these are emphasized.
Walter Benjamin (1986, p.155)

This thesis has, so far, moved from exploring the politics of memorials to the disappeared with a focus on space and time, to thinking of broader environments as memoryscapes, to examining how one project, Bordando por la Paz y la Memoria, demonstrates how memory work can rehumanise victims and rebuild worlds in the midst of their destruction. This chapter now takes another turn, building on what has come so far. Drawing on the ideas of time and presence, of affective environments, and of intimate actions to connect with the disappeared, this chapter is an exploration of what disappearance and memory might mean in the day-to-day lives of people who live with the constant presence of absence.

I once mentioned to someone who works with relatives of the disappeared that I would like to understand the practices and spaces of memory in the everyday lives of relatives. "There is no everyday life", she retorted. I accept this criticism, and agree that of course there is no life as it was before. Everyday life is incomprehensibly changed and life from this moment on has a before and an after. But days still go by, and relatives of the disappeared must continue to live in the homes and communities from which their children, partners, or parents, are missing, while they search and demand justice. The bedrooms of the disappeared are left as they were, their belongings wait for their return, and important dates and celebrations come around every year with a pain that does not lessen. It is in these intimate environments, where memories of those absent are overwhelming, that questions of the (in)distinction of absence and presence, and how disappearance is experienced by those left behind, come to the fore.

This, then, turns us towards the home as the space in which to explore these things. But this is not simply a move to explore the home as another space or site of memory. Neither is this about a distinction between memory and memorials that are public or private; things are never so dichotomous. Examples like the Museo Casa de la

Memoria Indómita, the Plaza de los Desaparecidos, and Bordando por la Paz have already demonstrated some ways in which the public and private realms are transgressed, bridged, and blurred. Instead, the point is that looking at intimate spaces and practices allows us to see different things, it brings up deeper questions. It is within these spaces – close to the personal effects of the disappeared and in the spaces they inhabited – that the experience of absence is felt like presence. It hangs, it haunts, it encompasses.

This experience of the presence of absence is of course deeply connected to memory. To return to the concept of place memory, Edward Casey (1996, p.24) posits, "Think only of what it means to go back to a place you know, finding it full of memories and expectations, old things and new things, the familiar and the strange, and much more besides". The home, and micro-spaces within it such as a place at a table, an armchair, a bed, are spaces where absence is strongly felt and memory is lived. In their book on death, memory, and material culture, Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey (2001, p102-103) explain how "processes of interaction between persons and their material environments tend to imprint objects with traces such that almost any personal possession can carry memories". Specifically, objects that are worn or that enclose the body, things that people interact with on a daily basis such as furniture, or things that express their relations with others such as handwritten letters, acquire a heightened emotional charge and can become "vehicles of memory" (Jelin 2007, p.141). The home is where memories of the life of the absent person are most vivid and much of their social identity is maintained (Wojtkowiak and Venbrux 2012, p210). Furthermore, the experience of absence has a temporal element; absence can refer to the trace of a previous presence, or to the trace of a possible presence, immanence (Kaye 2000, p.96).

This is to recognise that alongside the efforts of relatives of the disappeared to mobilise and participate in the politics of memory strategically, there are also intimate acts of memorialisation taking place (Robins 2013). Hester Parr et al. (2015) explain how, with missing persons, a focus on absence and memory that looks at larger representations of the past or spectral remains may miss the ways that absence and memory are actually practiced and experienced, as typical material memorial spaces may not exist or feel appropriate. Instead, relatives:

> may be left with more diffuse traces of the missing that reverberate through their everyday lives, in a manner not dissimilar to the absence-presence of the grieved-for dead, but perhaps experienced with a particular inflection precisely because they do not know if their person is still *alive* and *somewhere* (Parr et al. 2015, p.67 emphasis in original).

This is the particularity of disappearance. Absence is shaped by an ambiguous loss (Boss 1999; 2002), the lives and material belongings of the disappeared person and their relatives are on hold in the case of their return, and memory is alive and lived in these spaces and amongst these things.

Understanding intimate memorial practices and the experience of the presence of absence poses a methodological challenge. For researchers to reach a point where they are welcome in homes, into people's lives, calls for strong trusting relationships that take time to build, and is much harder than visiting a public memorial. I grabbed glimpses, small insights in comments about people's lives, that explained what everyday life with memory and disappearance is like, but over the time I spent in Mexico I was not in a position to explore this deeply. For example, only after watching a slide show of photographs of Roy Rivera several times at various events, did his mother Leticia Hidalgo explain to me in passing that the song she put it to is one Roy was playing on repeat in the days before he was disappeared (Hidalgo 2016a). And at one event I attended where memory and memorialisation was being discussed, the mother of a disappeared man explained: "We have memory, this is my son [showing a photograph of him], this is where memory is, in me, in my home, not in the state, not in the public" (El 77 2016). However, that I was unable to spend time in these intimate spaces is not reason enough to ignore this important aspect of memory and the experience of disappearance, not only academically but also politically; understanding the experience of the presence of absence is part of the restitution of personhood and identity to the disappeared, discussed in the previous chapter.

Without spending time within the homes and every day lives of relatives of the disappeared, there are still ways to explore the experience of the presence of absence. There is a small but important literature (often non-academic) that focuses not on the

contexts of disappearance and state violence, but on the stories of people, of their lives before their disappearance, and the struggles of their relatives to search. There are accounts of the experience of missing persons in the United Kingdom (Hogben 2006; Holmes 2008; Parr et al. 2016) and of disappearance elsewhere in Latin America (Stener Carlson 1996; Erlick 2011; Allen 2013; Robins 2013). In Mexico, journalists and relatives of the disappeared are producing books, websites, and films to tell the stories of the disappeared and the search for them (Turati and Rea 2012a; González 2014; Mastrogiovanni 2014; Ausencias 2015; Móncao Felipe 2015; Rea 2015; Pie de Pagina 2017a; Verástegui González 2018).

In May 2016, the association of relatives of the disappeared Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Nuevo León (FUNDENL, United Forces for our Disappeared in Nuevo León) published *La Presencia de la Ausencia* (The Presence of Absence; FUNDENL 2016), a collection of essays about the disappeared and reflections on disappearance in Mexico, written by members of FUNDENL in collaboration with journalists and academics. These stories tell us who the disappeared are, the things they like, the role they play in their families, and what their ambitions are. And they also tell us about who is missing them, what life is like for the relatives left with the presence of absence, particularly within their homes. The coordinators of *La Presencia* explain:

> Why make a book like this? So we do not forget. So the stories of our disappeared remain in memory. In the face of enforced amnesia, a relentless attempt to summarise figures, names, stories, and the pain of relatives of disappeared persons is important, to create spaces where silenced voices can be expressed, where we can know a little more about those whom we encounter as forced absences (Ramírez Atilano et al. 2016, p.7).

These actions are about sketching the missing person, drawing them, attempting to transform them from disappeared to the person they are. This is, in other words, to shift from seeing disappearance as their identity – *desaparecidos* – to seeing them in some of their fullness of personhood. But importantly for understanding the presence of absence, these essays describe life for the relatives left behind and searching. The essays in this book tell stories which are not shared in public during roundtables, conferences, and when confronting the state, and this chapter draws heavily on them,

using it as the source of much of the discussion, which is enhanced with accounts from elsewhere and stories that were shared with me.

This chapter first outlines what is specific to the experience of disappearance and its ambiguous loss that challenges and shapes the presence of absence: that the absent person may return at any time. The chapter then looks in detail at the spaces, objects, and rituals that enable continuing bonds with those absent, keeping them present in everyday life. Lastly, we turn to explore how disappearance reveals the deep relationality we have with one another, and how in losing someone we love, we also lose a sense of ourselves. Nurturing continuing bonds and understanding our relationality challenge our ideas of what absence means. This chapter is an exploration of the complex coming together of emotions, architecture, objects, and relationships that are changed by disappearance and shaped by absence. Each experience of this is of course personal and unique, but the connections between absence and memory take a different form when we pay attention to these intimate spaces and rituals, and it becomes clear that absence is not a simple experience, but is more often experienced as the presence of absence.

Esperar: **to wait, to hope, to expect**

One particular verb is used again and again in relatives' descriptions of their searches and lives in the wake of disappearance: *esperar*. In Spanish, *esperar* means to wait, to hope, and to expect. It contains a sense of longing, of time, and of belief and faith. Although this chapter draws on literature that explores absence due to death and bereavement, this is what is distinct about disappearance and missing persons; the experience of the presence of absence is comparable to death, but with disappearance relatives need to be prepared that the missing person may return.

Pauline Boss (1999, 2002) has described this kind of experience of loss as ambiguous. In her theorisation, there are two types of ambiguous loss; the first being people who are absent physically but remain psychologically present, and disappearance falls into this category. She explains (2002, p.s39), "not knowing whether a loved one is dead or alive defies emotional comprehension....Family members are preoccupied with the

lost person, and think of little else, even years later". The second type of ambiguous loss is for people who are perceived as physically present but psychologically absent, such as people with dementia or even cases of depression. It follows that ambiguous loss prevents a normal grief process; that without the certainty of death and a lack of closure, death and mourning rituals are not practiced and the reconstruction of family roles is disrupted (Boss 1999; Boss 2002; Hogben 2006; Holmes 2008; Clark, J. N. 2010).

In cases of disappearance and missing persons it is common to hear relatives left behind described as frozen, stuck, or overwhelmed with stasis (Clark, J. N. 2010); life is on hold (Hogben 2006), they are living in limbo (Holmes 2008). Socially, a person's grief is not validated, and communities can lose patience with the relative who is not moving on, leaving them isolated (Boss 2002, p.s39). Relatives have described being unable to give up searching or move on until they have certainty on whether the person is alive or dead (Holmes 2008; Parr et al. 2016), and they have rejected the idea that time can heal, describing their pain as as strong as it was the first day their relative went missing (Holmes 2008, p.25). Interviewing relatives of people who have gone missing in the UK, Hester Parr et al. (2016, p.70) spoke with one mother of a missing person who described,

> It doesn't matter whether its five years, ten years, twenty years. It never stops. It never stops in your mind. You're always searching. So searching is emotionally exhausting as well as physically exhausting and mentally exhausting because you are having to think of new ways to search all the time, as time goes by. Twenty years is a long time. (Misha, mother of Rob, missing for 20 years).

The relatives of FUNDENL have described their waiting and hoping; one mother "counts the days of the absence of her son on the patio wall in her house, hoping to see him return soon" (Torres Hernández and González 2016, p.102). They explain, "Hope does not die, and in this home it lives in the big brothers room, the brother who is expected (waited, hoped for), who is searched for" (Torres Hernández and González 2016, p.105). Addressing her missing son, one mother explains,

> You left home promising to come back; we are still waiting (expecting, hoping) for you. This door that has stayed open for you will never

> close. Your clothes, your drawings, your trophies and others continue in their place, as if you had never gone (Delgado Galván 2015, quoted in Treviño and Delgado Galván, 2016, p.30).

These practices of tending to and maintaining the spaces of the home and the belongings of the absent person within it are due to the ambiguity of the loss; the spaces and belongings of a person's life need to be ready for them to return to. Their rooms are often kept as they were on the day they left, not only for memory and as a strategy for coping with absence, but in part as an act that addresses the disappeared person, who may one day see how their relatives continued to take care for them and love them while they were absent. Clothes must be clean and folded, and through these rituals, like the embroidering in Chapter 5, relatives can demonstrate care, concern, affection, and hope. Living in an environment, therefore, which preserves the presence of the absent person, complicates the experience of absence, which relates to a conception of time. In intimate spaces such as these the disappeared person does not move into the dead past discussed in Chapter 3; it seems that in some way, within the home, the past cannot be in the past, the disappeared are always in the present present, in time and space.

This waiting, hoping, expecting, can have limitations on the lives of the family members left behind. It can affect their ability to make life plans or look forward to events (Holmes 2008, p.25). Susan Hogben (2006) explored how missing persons haunt and disrupt personal calendars, and Parr et al. (2016, p.73) demonstrate that some relatives have described being reluctant to leave the home, even for short periods, in case the missing person returns. As years pass this can mean an inability to engage in quotidian things like moving house or changing phone numbers. Jorge Gálvez, Director of the Museo Casa de la Memoria Indómita who we met in Chapter 3, shared with me some stories from his family and his mother in law, Rosario Ibarra de Piedra, who is searching for her son Jesús who was disappeared in 1974. He explained how the family home in Monterrey has been maintained the same colour, the same shade of yellow, since Jesús disappeared:

> They won't change the colour, because if he appears, if he's released, he is going to arrive and he'll know which the house is because it's the same colour, even though the surroundings have changed....So they're

> things that aren't only for us to remember but so he remembers, so he says "Ah, this is the house" (Gálvez 2016).

Pauline Boss argues that the relatives who cope best with ambiguous loss are those who are able to hold two contradictory ideas in mind at the same time; that their relative may be dead, and that they may walk through the door at any moment; that they may never find a body, and that they might well do so. She explains (2002, p.s39), "As one wife said, "I must move on and organise life without the missing person, but at the same time, I can hope and remember"". Despite seeing ambiguous loss as disruptive to a 'normal' mourning process, Boss does not argue that relatives experiencing such loss need to take steps to restore normal progress. To her (2002, p.s40), relatives need to find a different way to reconstruct their identities and roles otherwise their grief will remain frozen in place. Yet, explaining the experience of ambiguous loss in cases of disappearance as living in limbo or stuck in a grief process seems to ignore other dynamics that are at play in the lives of relatives of the disappeared. These metaphors or descriptions are not sufficient; they do not capture the political actions and energy with which relatives search and fight for justice. As Boss herself explained, relatives can hold and practice contradictory thoughts. They can wait for the return of their relative; this can be a hopeful waiting which believes in a future where their loved one will return and is not necessarily a passive waiting while all life is on hold. And all the while they wait, hope, expect, they can transform their lives and themselves to take on the challenges that they face; to search for the disappeared and to seek justice. Parr et al. (2016, p.67) concur: "We disrupt a straightforward story of the freezing capacity of loss in relation to missing people, identifying the many ways whereby families are active agents in responding to this particular kind of absence", namely, through searching. In searching, which will be explored in Chapter 8, relatives are not simply frozen in incapacity, and their experience of ambiguous loss can and does develop over years (Parr et al. 2016).

To return to *La Presencia de la Ausencia*, Irma Alma Ochoa Treviño who collaborates with FUNDENL (2016, p.143) describes,

> With sadness reflected in their faces, relatives tear off the pages of calendars and watch one by one the days, months, and years pass, without knowing the whereabouts of their loved ones, without the

> possibility of hugging them, of seeing their eyes, of listening to their voice, without finding them. Meanwhile, they wait (expect, hope) for them, they name them, they search for them, they draw them, they embroider them, they sing them, they write them.

Esperar – to wait, to hope, to expect – is not necessarily a passive or fixed state. It can guide people in ambiguous loss; it can help people to find meaning. In her research on relatives of missing persons in the UK, Lucy Holmes (2008, p.20) explained, "Hope was described both as a dutiful, respectful maintenance of a positive outlook, and as a more heartfelt belief that the missing person was likely to be found at some point". To continue to demonstrate care, to be ready for a return, or to worry, even, are forms of hope as they are banking on a future. The experience of absence, or the presence of absence, is mitigated, therefore, through this waiting, through the need to be ready for the return of the disappeared. Those absent remain in some ways present within intimate spaces, as life is in some ways on hold for the relatives left behind. However, there is another dimension of time at play; the future. The waiting, hoping, expecting, but also the searching, and justice, are about the future of the family and their lives together. A future where those absent are present.

Present presence: spaces, objects, rituals

I want now to leave these developments to one side, and explore the ways in which absence is made present within the home and in intimate practices of relatives of the disappeared. I want to explore the ways that relatives maintain continuing bonds with those absent, and what this means for the experience of the presence of absence and of memory. Spaces, objects, and rituals reoccur in the testimonies of relatives of the disappeared, through which absence is felt as presence and continuing bonds are maintained. Some interdisciplinary work explores the geographies and emotions of bereavement, mourning, and remembrance (Hallam and Hockey 2001; Hockey et al. 2005; Maddrell and Sidaway 2012; Maddrell 2013; Maddrell 2016). Describing bereavement, Avril Maddrell (2013, p.504) has explained that living with absence is an experience of "nowhere, but everywhere" in everyday spaces associated with, in her example, the deceased. She (2013, p.505, emphasis in original) describes this as an "absent presence": "whomever is absent is so strongly missed, their very absence is

tangible" through the material topography of their homes. Within the home it can feel as if the deceased are still living: "Take, for example, the chair belonging to the deceased partner, its spatial location still making it a focal point for conversation, and, when used by visitors, an embodiment of their continuing presence in the home and participation in interaction" (Hockey et al. 2005, p.139).

A theory of continuing bonds has developed in psychology and bereavement counseling for some decades, to describe the practices through which those living continue to feel connected with the deceased (Klass et al. 1996). This can be performative and embodied, expressed through rituals such as religious practices or commemorations, but according to Maddrell (2013, p.508) continuing bonds are more often manifested and sustained through material objects, such as graves, plants, domestic shrines, and photographs, to name a few. Maddrell (2013, p.516) explains how continuity of care for the deceased through maintaining graves, for example, is an important element, a sentiment we saw in the maintenance of the +43 antimonumento and the Plaza de los Desaparecidos in Chapter 3, and in the process of stitching in Chapter 5, as well through being constantly prepared for the return of the missing person.

In *La Presencia de la Ausencia*, these themes and ideas are prevalent. We can see how intimate spaces, objects, and rituals come together to challenge the distinction of absence and presence in the wake of disappearance. This is pushing towards what Yael Navaro-Yashin (2009, p.1) described in a different post-war context, as "how it feels to live with the objects and within the ruins left behind by the other". The home can become a stage through which to remember the past and imagine futures, triggered by everyday activities and the presence of the absence of the disappeared. One mother from FUNDENL describes,

> With an absent heart, your place at the table, and an empty plate, I take a mouthful almost without chewing. I imagine you sitting opposite me, devouring your favorite meal along with a big big glass of water. To watch you eat is a delight; to watch you smile, to see your eyes blink and your restless hands lifting some food to your mouth, is a blessing. And despite the fact that it is all imagined, I feel blissful doing it, I can

> invent a whole day with you (Delgado Galván 2015, quoted in Treviño and Delgado Galván 2016, p.29).

As Maddrell describes, absence is felt almost tangibly within the home; it can almost be touched, it almost has material form. The memory relatives experience on a daily basis is amongst them; they live with it, and practice it in small gestures and rituals. This most intimate of environments has profoundly changed, yet is the same. Traces of the disappeared person are everywhere, all round the house, in the mundane marks and memories of events that make up our lives. Absence is felt at dining tables, in empty chairs, and in empty bedrooms:

> It has been almost five years since they took Carlitos. His absence weighs down on every corner of the house. His photographs remain hanging on the fridge and on the walls. His room is intact, along with the marks of his childhood and adolescence – like the scratches in the bathroom door that he made during one trivial chat – his clothes are still in his drawers and his American Football trophies on the shelves. For Laura [his mother], maintaining his belongings is the same as maintaining the presence of her son alive, to look at his image every day, his smile, which is "his mark, his star". For the same reason Carlos [his father] began to use his son's clothes – and because they are the same size – from his Levi trousers to his polo shirts (Treviño and Delgado Galván 2016, p.29).

Different objects have different potencies, with some creating a fleeting sensation of proximity to the absent person, and others felt as overwhelming or threatening (Hallam and Hockey 2001, p.203). Although elsewhere in the thesis we have seen objects and materials produced for ritualised memorialisation, these are objects that become vehicles of memory because they are entangled with the life of the disappeared person (Hallam and Hockey 2001, p.211).

In the absence of their owner, mundane items used everyday such as perfume, hats, and wallets gain significance, and "their persistent materiality can obtrude into a present where they cannot easily be incorporated into a new scheme of things, nor can they be thrown away" (Hockey et al. 2005, p.141). Material objects, a person's effects, have a perceived capacity to endure over time; the materiality of lives survives the

person (Hallam and Hockey 2001, p.92; Edkins 2011). Clothes, particularly, seem to have an emotional charge; they contain closeness to the absent body, an intimacy with the absent person who they protected and kept warm. "Four years have passed since César disappeared. Four years that his clothes have been stored and folded, ready to be used by their owner one more time" (Álvarez Ibarra et al. 2016, p.40). His clothes are waiting, hoping, expecting, César's return.

> For Ramiro, his brother is still alive, and for Mayra – their mother – he is too. His room remains as he left it, a room located on the second floor of a house in the Guadalupe neighbourhood. They are the big brother's things, everything the same: the bed, the drawers full of clothes, the sweatshirts, trousers and shirts. "Sometimes I put on my brothers shirts, and then I put them back as they were; I don't want anything to happen to them", Ramiro said (Torres Hernández and González 2016, p.105).

When wearing the clothes of the absent person, a relative is temporarily close to them, and in some way embodies them and makes them present. In trying on their clothes, you find you may be the same size, have the same body. These clothes often smell of the absent person, and after some time of absence to encounter the smell of a person you love is an experience of presence so tangible it almost has form. But for this reason it is something precious, and something that cannot be preserved:

> It hurts a lot to settle for only seeing your photographs, to go into your room and realise that with the passing of time the clothes have lost your smell. It hurts to go in and see it empty; it seems like these four walls are also crying for you (Delgado Galván 2015, quoted in Treviño and Delgado Galván 2016, p.30).

These spaces, objects, and rituals can create continuing bonds across generations that do not have personal memories of the disappeared. Jorge Gálvez explained that *Doña* Rosario no longer lives in the yellow house they maintained for Jesús. She moved in next-door with Jorge and his family as, after so many years, the yellow house was too painful for her. When she moved, however, she brought certain objects with her into their home:

> It's these details, these things, it could be a place but it's also the personal objects, in this case the chair, the books, his music.

> Photographs. Every day she kisses it [his photo], so she takes him with her. We maintain these tiny things with the family, with the grandchildren, so that they know this is the chair their uncle sat in....There are some stones that were in the garden of the yellow house [and have been moved next door]....So we have these because these are the stones they played with as children, that Jesús played with. And we have them outside of the house as part of the decoration, but they have meaning (Gálvez 2016).

Coming through in these excerpts are also the small and personal rituals that relatives undertake which maintain continuing bonds and demonstrate commitment to being hopeful, to waiting. Kissing their photos, keeping their rooms and belongings tidy, remembering quotidian things done together, brings the present and the absent close: "She hangs a photo of Efra on her chest like a scapular" (Carrillo Cantú et al. 2016, p.47). But when dates such as birthdays, holidays, and anniversaries come around they can be emotionally destabilising. Lucy Holmes (2008, p.21) had relatives explain to her they become sleepless when the anniversary of when the person went missing comes around, and Parr et al. (2016, p.73) learned how some relatives continue to send text messages to the missing persons' phone, just in case. One mother in FUNDENL has developed a ritual for her son's birthday: "when there is no place to leave flowers, Maricela took them to the first church that was nearby. She wants to continue to do this, until César appears or she has no more strength to continue to fight" (Álvarez Ibarra et al. 2016, p.38). Markers of dates and the normal rituals we perform to celebrate life are adjusted. Personal and intimate rituals that relatives practice are not confined to the home or domestic space either, a private practice in public space such as a church is possible.

These intimate spaces, objects, and rituals bring the presence of absence so close it is tangible. The presence is present in space and time in the homes and daily lives of the relatives of the disappeared. These acts demonstrate love and care for the disappeared. Through them continuing bonds with those absent are maintained and nurtured, and are both practices of memory and strategies for survival. For looking to a future, for waiting and hoping.

Relationality

There is another side to the presence of absence which shapes the lives of relatives in the wake of disappearance, and in many ways this is the other type of ambiguous loss that Boss described: to be physically present but psychologically absent. In the absence of someone you love, through disappearance or death, a deep relationality with that person and others in a broader community is revealed. When someone disappears it exposes how we are connected to them and construct ourselves and our identities through each other. So when someone disappears, something of the relatives', and others who were close to them, identity and sense of presence can be lost too.

Jorge Verástegui González, who is himself searching for his brother and nephew, coordinated a book in the same vein as *La Presencia*, called *Memoria de un corazón ausente: historias de vida* (Memory of an absent heart: stories of life), which tells stories of the disappeared through the words of their relatives. In the introduction he explains how telling these stories is in a way part of the search for those missing, and describes (2018, p148), "To search, then, not only refers to the missing person, but also to the urgent need to recover an important element of the life of the person who remains. When searching we also try to find ourselves in the senselessness of disappearance". Something about who he is is constructed in relation to his uncle and nephew and so, in their absence, he finds something of himself lost also.

When someone is disappeared they are missing in several senses; their body is absent and their belongings and the spaces they inhabited remain and remind us of that absence, but they are also missing in the sense that they *are missed* by family and friends. They are missed in their position within a complex network of social relations, as a parent, a brother, a colleague, or a child. Discussing grief and mourning after a death, Judith Butler (2006, p.22) suggests:

> Many people think that grief is privatizing, that it returns us to a solitary situation and is, in that sense, depoliticizing. But I think it furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order, and it does this first of all by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have

> implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility.

It is this idea that underpins the slogan used by activists and relatives of the disappeared; *los desaparecidos nos faltan a todos*, that the disappeared are missed by all of us, that they are lacking from all of our lives. Thinking in this way also exposes the political and social structures that create disappearances. Speaking of the Argentine context, Gabriel Gatti (2014, p.12 emphasis in original) explains:

> Gerardo Gatti or Adriana Gatti are not just *my disappeared*; do not kid yourself. They are also yours, because they are a product of the things that make us what we are: the old Batllista welfare state, the old populist dream of Peronism, the good old aspiration of social homogeneity, the dream of a civilized nation, the rhetoric of the civilizing project, the Great America, the dream of progress, the enlightened perfectionist zeal.

The disappearance of the person you love is part of a system, part of a structure that is disappearing many other people, and that person is part of a complex social fabric, woven into the lives of many others. In the violence of disappearance some of this relationality is exposed:

> Only a hole is left. An empty space where now nothing is sustained. Only the loose threads of pain that are felt by your absence, and the threads of hope that some day the hole will be fixed. But now we don't speak of only one hole but of many, that attack the fabric that has been woven of stories, paths that are made up of futures, futures that are absent and threaten to continue that way, and threaten a constant nostalgia for the future (Márquez and Huerta 2016, p.88).

When someone disappears or is absent in another form, it is that specific person who is missed. Those people played certain roles in families and for friends, their characters brought something to a group of people when they were present: "He is, we say, the needle and thread that knits the family. José fills this role" (Lugo 2016, p.78). A sister is missed, for who she was, for the energy she brought with her, and the position she had in the family:

> She went, and although I believe she will come back, each day is harder to live between this silence. It is sad when every silent night I

> want to hear her voice. It's this same voice that bit by bit I feel I am forgetting. But what I don't forget is her smile and the sense of freedom she always had. The way she danced with animals and her love for nature. I know she'll return because we haven't said goodbye to her. I know she'll return because she can't live without me, and I can't without her. I know she'll return because she always returns. It's that easy. I love her and I know that she loves me too (Cruz López et al. 2016, p.61).

Relatives miss the person that held the family together, the person that made them laugh, the person who loved nature. And again, as with the smell of a person in their clothes, there is a fear of forgetting these intimate details. As smells and memories of the details of that person seem to fade with time, spaces, objects, and rituals become even more important.

However, Jenny Edkins (2011, p.192, emphasis in original) explains how these attempts to summarise a person through the roles they play in life and therefore how they are missed, is never quite enough. She argues:

> we cannot sum up the uniqueness of a person by summarizing the range of roles that they play. Roles may tell us *what* someone is or what they "do," but not *who* they are, in all their irreplaceability. There is always something more, something not encompassed by the social role, or something less, something required by the role that the particular person does not quite fit.

In missing persons she finds examples of a politics where the person as such matters, what she calls "a politics of the person as missing" (Edkins 2011, p.2). This is, in regards to memory and everyday life, a focus on the person as a person, how they are missed, the particular and specific space they leave, and how this is felt through the relationality of that person with their friends, family, and community.

The relationality can, at times, have a very clear presence. When gestures appear in relatives of the disappeared or when children age and begin to look like the absent person, our clear sense of absence and presence is again thrown into confusion.

> The last time I visited little Fernanda [daughter of José] she said to me: "Tell me one thing, uncle: is my father dead?" She looked at me with

> the same eyes that José looked at me with, and with the same inquisitive gesture; with her shoulders thrown back and her face tipped ahead and a gaze to the side but eyes direct....Milan Kundera says that gestures have their own life, that someone doesn't possess gestures but that gestures possess someone. At times a gesture can appear in any place, time and person, as if they were spirits incarnated. This is certain; those who have a *desaparecido* know this very well (Lugo 2016, p.77).

These apparitions of the absent person can be sudden and fleeting, like feelings of sadness they lie dormant and then trigger an irruption of memory (Wilde 1999; Holmes 2008). Jorge Gálvez (2016) explained to me: "My oldest son looks a lot like Jesús....My son now is 21. When Jesús disappeared he was 21 years old. A boy. So they look very alike. And they say also he has gestures that are very like Jesús". In these bodily characteristics, absence and presence is momentarily blurred, and we can see that the absent person continues within us.

Relatives understand that their son, or partner, or parent was connected to the world in many ways before they disappeared, and are still connected to it now, even in the absence of their body. Some recognise that they will continue to be connected to the world and the present present, as long as they continue to speak of them and their life with personhood:

> Go beyond, Galo, because you are alive alive alive. There is no death for someone who is in memory every day. Your life hasn't ended because we continue to write it, like the footprints of a giant elephant who walks the across the city remembering, remembering (De Luna Guajardo and Romero 2016, p.98).

His story continues, his bodily absence does not mean he is in the past:

> This story, that did not begin the day Osvaldo was born, 34 years ago, but much before, when his Grandmother traveled the streets in her little wooden cart, does not finish here. It is a story that continues. Because to refer to the story of someone is to refer, although it could be veiled, to the story or stories of every person that has been touched by his presence (Nieto Puente and Flores 2016, p.121).

The relatives of Galo and Osvaldo recognise the deep relationality of our lives. For Edkins (2011, p.192), the exchange of stories about missing persons is a process of thinking about who we are as particular embodied beings that have lives, and it is when we are unable to be part of this exchange of stories that we lose a sense of who we are: the catastrophe of identity and language that disappearance creates (Gatti 2014). She explains (2011, p.192) that to tell the story of someone who is missing as absent, as not present in their lives, "would be a denial of the hope that they might one day return to be the participant once more in their own story, or a refusal to admit that their story maybe continuing in another place, among a different group of people".

For relatives, this has an emotional but also a political purpose. Emotionally, in the ambiguous loss they are experiencing this understanding of how that person was connected to generations before them, and is connected to generations ahead, gives an ecological perspective to existence. They may temporarily be unable to locate the body, but the life of the disappeared person continues in different ways. And politically this way of viewing the world resists narratives that push the disappeared into the dead past. The disappeared are present, they have presence, and they have a future. So their story continues, because "to refer to the story of someone is to refer, although it could be veiled, to the story or stories of every person that has been touched by his presence" (Nieto Puente and Flores 2016, p.121).

Conclusions

Absence is not a simple experience. When someone disappears the many subtle and complex ways in which their presence is felt means that in fact absence is experienced as a presence; the absent person is still tangibly felt. In this chapter I have delved into the messiness and complexity of absence, specifically with ambiguous loss, in the nexus of emotions, issues of identity and belonging, memory, materiality, space, and practices. This chapter, therefore, moves us in the thesis from something that could easily be called memory, to something more ephemeral, something harder to define and pin down.

These stories have focused on the domestic, but this is not a move to frame domestic space as simply another space of memory. This move comes, because to look at the domestic and intimate leads us to ask deeper questions about what disappearance means and how it is experienced by those left behind. Spaces, objects, and rituals nurture continuing bonds with the disappeared making them present within the home, and the ways people interact with these is a crucial aspect of memory. Maintaining these continuing bonds and the personal effects of the disappeared person is a way of coping with such violence and trauma on one hand, but it is also an action directed towards the disappeared themselves. Through this care and tending, the disappeared can see that they were not forgotten. Particularly, clothes and other things that had an intimate connection with the body seem to be the objects that maintain the closeness, through which the presence of absence is felt strongest. Maintaining and looking after these spaces, objects, and rituals are part of the practice of *esperar* – to wait, to hope, to expect. But the lives of relatives living with the ambiguous loss of disappearance are not simply frozen and stuck. While waiting, hoping, expecting, they are searching and demanding justice. They are transforming themselves and adapting their lives, and this is what the next two chapters will focus on: the relatives and their searches. Parr et al. (2016, p.67) argue that searching is a key mode through which emotional management takes place for relatives, and they suggest that a continued search for missing persons is in fact an act of re-presencing them.

Central to these discussions is that, in practice, there is some indistinction between absence and presence, at least in how it is experienced by those left behind. However, as we shall see when we look at the search in more depth, demands for justice, and the system justice functions within, needs clear and delimited definitions of absence and presence. The concepts of absence and presence also relate to the discussions of time that have been building through the thesis. Those defined as clearly absent will be pushed into the past, unless relatives work in their personal lives and fight in public to keep them in the present present. This maintenance of objects and spaces, the nurturing of continuing bonds, waiting, hoping, and expecting, and of course the search, are all actions that speak to a future, a future which has the disappeared as active agents in their lives once more. In this chapter I also put forward the idea that through disappearance we can see and understand how we are constituted relationally with the people, communities, spaces, and things we interact with in our lives. In

disappearance, not only do we find a fragility of the identity of the person who was disappeared, but of those people who miss them, whose identities are constructed in relation to them. But in this we find, as we will see in the following two chapters, a different kind of identity, a relational identity, which has strength in how it is constructed communally.

This chapter began with a quote from Walter Benjamin: that to live means to leave traces. These traces are clear throughout this chapter, in material objects, in relatives' bodies, in empty spaces, and in the relationality of the disappeared to their communities and families. We are not simple individuals; when we are disappeared the complexity of how we live and exist in the world is revealed. And it is through these traces, the material and emotional topographies of our homes and lives, that we experience a memory that is lived, embodied, and intimate.

Chapter 7: Huellas de la Memoria

Many propositions that seem counterintuitive are not so; we just don't know their connections yet. Plodding craft labor is a means to discover it

Richard Sennett (2008, p.128)

In Chapter 6 we looked at the experience of relatives living with the presence of the absence of someone they love. It focused on the objects and belongings left behind by that person, through which continuing bonds were nurtured and the idea of a clear distinction between presence and absence was challenged. This chapter, and the project it focuses on, explores another object that speaks and tells stories of disappearance: the worn-out shoes of those searching. The focus in this chapter, therefore, is not the absence and ambiguous loss that disappearance creates, although the shoes have a relationship with absence, but on the search for the disappeared that their relatives undertake. The thesis in fact takes a turn in this chapter and the next, from memorials and the lives of the disappeared, to the search and the transformative actions of relatives. This chapter also in many ways follows Chapter 5 on the project Bordando por la Paz, by exploring one collective memory project in detail, focussing on the process of making and the development of the project, rather than simply analysing the end product, and builds on the ideas of touch and care explored in the previous two chapters. Like Bordando, the value of this project resides in its detail, in every cut of the lino tool, in every print, in the relationships it cultivates, in the community it constructs, in the pain it conveys, and in the stories it shares and tells.

The project and collective Huellas de la Memoria (Footprints of Memory), engraves the soles of shoes worn by relatives while searching for their disappeared, with words about whom they are searching for, which are then printed. In Spanish, the word *huella* means both footprint and trace, so conveys a sense of a mark left behind. Like Bordando por la Paz, I spent time first meeting with the artist behind the project, and then working with the collective it became. The time I spent engraving and printing gave me insights into the material qualities of the shoes and what effect this has on the project; what working with and touching these objects does, how they contain stories and speak, and what that can mean for communicating and constructing

solidarity and community. But this chapter is also about shoes as specific objects that move, that walk, that march and, if we follow their footprints and traces, make tracks and map the spaces of disappearance. Through the worn-out shoes of relatives we can see some of the spatialities and temporalities of disappearance in Mexico and beyond, and again we find community. These are not paths that only one person has trodden, but many.

In recent years in international politics, geography, sociology and many other disciplines, there has been a turn towards materialism. This 'new materialism' is a turn away from an anthropocentric view of the world to a view which, drawing on Actor Network Theory (Latour 1987), does not privilege some entities over others (Miller 2005; Bennett 2010; Coole and Frost 2010; Marres and Lezaun 2011; Connolly 2013; Coole 2013; Srnicek et al. 2013; Lundborg and Vaughan-Williams 2015). A key debate in this turn is to recognise agency as distributed across human and non-human entities (Hockey et al. 2005, p.135; Coole 2013, p.457). In her book *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett argues the dominant Western conceptualisation of matter as dead or completely instrumentalised supports and feeds a colonial and consumption-based approach to the world. Bennett (2010, p.viii) instead believes things have the capacity, "not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own". For politics, then, the question becomes, "how objects, devices, settings and materials acquire explicit political capacities, and how they serve to enact material participation as a specific public form" (Marres and Lezaun 2011, p489).

Yet, I do not want to enter too far into these debates on agency and anthropocentrism. Instead, I take from them the idea that people, other beings, and things exist in a complex web of relations, and I also turn to literature on material culture to understand what these things do in the world, what Arjun Appadurai (1986; 2006) has called "the social life of things". What seems to be lacking in studies of material culture, as Tim Ingold (2012, p.7) recognises, is an exploration of the process that bring the things themselves into being, in both a focus on the materials of which they are made, and the sensory practice of the maker. Sidestepping the debate on agency, which Ingold (2012, p.96) dismisses by questioning why we credit humans with agency in the first instance, I focus instead on the process of becoming: "In the act of

making the artisan couples his [sic] own movements and gestures – indeed his [sic] very life – with the becoming of his [sic] materials, joining with and following the forces and flaws that bring his [sic] work to fruition" (Ingold 2012, p.31).

Recognising the problematic history of the term materialism, and the contemporary limitations of the study of material culture, Richard Sennett (2008) argues we need to turn a fresh page. He (2008, p.8) explains, "We can do so simply by asking – though the answers are anything but simple – what the process of making concrete things reveals to us about ourselves". This question runs throughout this chapter. In focusing on the process of making, or in this case intervening in, altering, a thing, we can learn something about ourselves, our contexts, our relations, our emotions, and our communities. Ingold explains how the question of material agency only arises on account of the reduction of things to objects. He (2012, p.97) argues, "We need a theory not of agency but of life, and this theory must be one – as Barad puts it – 'that allows matter its due as an active participant of the world's becoming'". This chapter, then, values things, specifically shoes, as actors in a network that shapes our social, cultural, and material world, and the experience of disappearance. Underpinning this approach is the assumption that making is a form of thinking and knowing (Sennett 2008; Ingold 2012).

Since 2011, relatives of the disappeared have organised a march on Mothers Day, the Marcha por la Dignidad Nacional (March for National Dignity) that we saw in Chapter 4, to protest their absences at home (movimiento por nuestros desaparecidos en México 2018b). It was during this march in Mexico City in 2013, that sculptor and artist Alfredo López Casanova marched alongside the mothers and fathers of the disappeared and began to focus on their shoes, listening to the sounds of their marching feet. He thought about where those shoes had been, the journeys they had made, the spaces they had entered in the search for the disappeared, and the miles and miles to which they testify (López Casanova 2016). In these worn out shoes he could see, and understand a little of, the relatives' search for the disappeared.

Alfredo is experienced in lino cutting and printing, and he began to think of the possibility of engraving into the soles of these shoes. He approached Leticia Hidalgo from Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Nuevo León (United Forces for

Our Disappeared in Nuevo León, FUNDENL), and asked if she would lend him a pair of her worn out shoes. They knew each other and he knew what had happened to her son Roy, so when she obliged he carved the words, "My name is Letty Hidalgo and I am searching for my son" on one shoe, and "Roy was disappeared on the 11 January 2011", onto the other. He then printed them, creating a footprint, and the project developed from there (López Casanova 2016). He shared images of the prints on social media and relatives approached him, wanting to participate, while others offered their assistance with logistics. Huellas de la Memoria is now a collective of people who have, at the time of writing, engraved and printed roughly 215 pairs of shoes and which is constantly growing (Colectivo Huellas de la Memoria 2018a).

Alfredo and I first met in November 2015 in a café a few blocks from the central plaza in Mexico City. He brought along the pair of shoes he was about to start work on which he had just received from a mother. He showed me the note that came with them, which said:

> My name is Julia Alonso Carbajal. I am searching for my son Julio Alberto, disappeared in Santiago, Nuevo León on the 12 January 2008. My boy, I have walked from north to south and will follow your footprints until I find you. Your mum, who cries for you every day. (Footprints of Memory 2018a; Figure 33).

The next time we met was in February 2016, when I went to his studio to talk to him while he engraved and printed a pair of shoes (López Casanova 2016). I spent several hours there, watching the process from start to finish, and asking questions that moved from the texture of the shoes, to the techniques of engraving and printing, to the emotional impact of doing this work, to the issue of disappearance in Mexico, activism and solidarity, and the wider war on drugs. Making and observing in the workshop became inseparable from the conversations we were having and how we were sharing understandings of memory and disappearance as well as the craft of printing. As with embroidering, talking while doing and making made our conversations richer.

Figure 33: The footprints of Julia Alonso Carbajal. Photo credit: Huellas de la Memoria.

This chapter expands out from this insight. Huellas is, principally, a project that intervenes in public memory; it is a collective effort to demand attention for those who are disappeared and for those who are still here, searching for them. The collective describe it as memory that is alive, memory that fights for justice and accompanies the relatives, and as a memory project it is ongoing; there is no point at which it is finished (Colectivo Huellas de la Memoria 2016). This chapter, then, is divided into three sections. The first, Making, focuses on the detail of the process; to think through what it tells us about the experience of disappearance, what it means to the people involved, and what kind of memory this is constructing. Throughout this is a focus on the material, both the shoes and the tools with which the *huellas* are made. The chapter then turns to look at two aspects of the social lives of the shoes and footprints; what, once they have been engraved and printed, they do in the world. Firstly, in Translating, I explore how they translate stories, empathy, and understanding, but also how the shoes as objects themselves and the people who print them, are also translated and transformed. Secondly, in Connecting, we see the many ways in which the shoes, prints, and the project in general, has created communities

and visibilised the spatial and temporal connections of searching, as well as the structural nature of the violence itself.

Making

Huellas de la Memoria is a project that began with an exploration of tools and materials. It was the idea of a sculptor, someone who is accustomed to exploring the material qualities of things with their hands, and doing so from a workshop. By doing what is often lacking in studies of material culture – exploring the processes that bring things into being by focusing on the material qualities of the shoes, paint, paper, and tools, and the sensory practice of the maker – we can begin to unpick the more subtle processes taking place in this project, and also in the social lives of these shoes and prints, and how this relates to memory.

The first thing Alfredo does when he receives a pair of shoes is investigate the soles – the material they are made of and their texture – and he then decides how to go about engraving them. He has developed three different techniques that can accommodate all types of sole: a simple lino cutter works for the majority of shoes, an electronic lino cutter is used on soles that are particularly hard and, in cases where the sole is too textured or broken, lino is cut to the shape of the sole and engraved instead, and then glued onto the sole. He explained the project is "also an investigation of materials, the soles" (this quote and all following quotes in this chapter from López Casanova 2016). The time it takes to complete a pair varies depending on the sole and method, with some taking just a few hours, and others with harder soles taking a full day (Figure 34). Once he has decided upon the method, he either draws the words onto the soles in pen or, if lino is to be used, he sometimes takes the lino to have the outline of the words burnt onto them. These words are usually taken from handwritten notes that arrive with the shoes. They need to be written back to front so that when printed they are legible. Writing back to front – a mirror image of letters – is something Alfredo has mastered through practice:

> You need to investigate these things by doing it. I had the idea but didn't know how to do it....now I have been doing this a year, it's been a year I've been engraving. And I am now much faster, at the

beginning I didn't know what I was doing but now I do with all types of shoes.

Figure 34: López Casanova engraving a boot with a lino cutter in his studio, Mexico City.

The engraving is completed through whatever means are needed; with the shoe on a table or a lap, with whichever tool, in however long it takes. Alfredo explained, "Sometimes I get tired, my eyes, not my hand. From focussing." Once the engraving is complete the shoes are ready to be printed. Generally, only one print of each pair is made. Although there is the potential to produce many more, it is not the intention. Like the handkerchiefs of Bordando por la Paz, this project is not motivated by productivist ideas of speed and quantity. To print them, ink is squeezed onto a piece of perspex and with a roller spread evenly onto the sole of the shoe. "You need to watch to cover it all well with paint. From here we need to do it quickly, so the paint doesn't dry". He uses water-based printing ink. It can be done in oil-based paint, but water-based dries much faster, and in making this decision he also had in mind the possibilities of printing elsewhere – teaching others in a workshop or in the street – so

practically this makes sense. Simple A4 printer paper is used to print the sole, and the shoe is placed onto the paper, heel or toe first, and eased down slowly onto the page to avoid wrinkles or creases (Figure 35). Alfredo explained: "The professional paper for engraving and printing is cotton paper, but I'm not interested in that. It could be cotton paper, but I don't know, I like it this way". Using paper that is affordable and easy to source is another way this project focuses more on the method and process than the artwork. Finally, pressure is needed to help the print come out well, so the round back of a spoon is firmly rubbed over the reverse of the paper while it is stuck to the paint on the sole, toe to heel, side to side, every centimetre covered. The paper is then peeled back from the shoe and the footprint is revealed.

Figure 35: López Casanova printing the engraved sole of the boot in his studio, Mexico City.

Following both Tim Ingold and Richard Sennett, I see making as a process of thinking. Ingold (2012, p20-21) explains:

> We are accustomed to thinking of making as a project. That is to start with an idea in mind, of what we want to achieve, and with a supply of

> the raw material needed to achieve it. And it is to finish at the moment when the material has taken on the intended form. At this point, we say, we have produced an artefact....I want to think of making, instead, as a process of growth. This is to place the maker from the outset as a participant in amongst a world of active materials. These materials are what he [sic] has to work with, and in the process of making he [sic] 'joins forces' with them, bringing them together or splitting them apart, synthesising and distilling, in anticipation of what might emerge.

Rather than thinking taking place in one's head and then being applied to a project of making, knowledge grows from practical and observational engagements with both beings and things around them, what Ingold (2012, p.6) calls "an art of inquiry". This approach does not divide understanding from doing (Sennett 2008, p.125); making is much more organic. Developments in technique take place while doing, through learning. It is often a process of improvisation; permutations occur slowly, distilled by practice (Sennett 2008, p.128).

The shoes Alfredo engraved on the day I first went to his studio were boots with a very soft sole and engraving by hand was easy and progressed quickly (Figure 34). He prefers using a simple cutter directly into the sole and prioritises it where possible: "I will always privilege engraving directly into the sole for everything the sole means". Engraving directly into the shoe rather than using lino is less of an intervention, it somehow stays truer to the object in the form it arrived and to the stories of the search it conveys. The soles of the boots we were printing were spongy and porous, so the shoes absorbed the ink and the prints came out quite textured and hard to read. He explained, "There are some that come out really well. When the sole is very smooth you don't need to do anything to them. The lino ones always come out well." But from an aesthetic perspective the only thing that is important to Alfredo is that they are legible. He could try and use a press to help make the prints come out well: "I could put it [lino] through the press....It would be impossible to put a shoe in the press. I could take the sole off some, but I don't want to. It would lose the sentiment". So, Alfredo explained, referring to the boots, "what I do is to recuperate it [the print] a little. Sometimes doing a second print comes out well....These were very easy to engrave but not so easy to print". He took a small amount of paint, water, and a fine brush, and tidied up points that helped with the legibility of the footprint: "This would

be bad for the orthodox print maker. But I don't care. For example, here, I just make a tiny intervention here. Respecting the print" (Figure 36).

Figure 36: López Casanova retouching the print of the boot with some watered-down paint in his studio, Mexico City.

Present throughout the process of engraving and printing the shoes is a tension between the maker and the material qualities of the shoes, paint, paper, and tools. The maker's body and experiences come together with the materials and tools to print the shoes and communicate the stories of their owners. There is a balance between intervening in the shoes, to not change or alter them too much, to try and stay true to the condition they arrived in, as they capture, at that moment, the search. The shoes as objects have stories, they convey the social lives they have had to that point in time, and the maker respects that those stories are communicated through all the materiality of the shoes: through how worn out the sole is, through how much the foot is imprinted inside, through the style of the shoe, through the dirt that covers them. The cracks in the soles that appear in the prints, which disrupt the legibility, are part of the story of that shoe, its owner, and where it has been. Alfredo explains, "I am really

interested in and it's important to me, the accidents that happen when they are printed. Because this is a footprint, no? A part of the journey".

On that first visit to the studio Alfredo asked if I would like to try engraving, so I took the lino cutter and one of the boots and engraved back-to-front the words HIJO MIO (my son). He later asked if I would like to engrave more, and suggested I take home a pair of the lino soles used on shoes that cannot be engraved directly, to work on them in my own time. I keenly took up this offer, glad to be able to experience the process and to help with the workload that was building up. Engraving the pair took around ten hours. The lino I was given had the outline of the words burnt into them, and I took my time being as precise as I could. I used a fine lino cutter, good for the lettering but slow with larger areas. The story of these shoes was heavily on my mind as I began: "My name is María del Rosario Morales Galván, I am searching for my brother José Martín, disappeared on the 23 February 2012 in Piedras Negras, Coahuila. I search with strength, without the time to wait for a new dawn, until I find you" (Figure 37). But as the hours passed I began to focus also on how they looked aesthetically, on how much was done and what more there was to do, and on how the engraving was starting to come together.

Figure 37: Lino soles I engraved at home, Mexico City.

The process also had a physical impact as the hours passed. The cutter wore into my hand and I developed hard skin on my forefinger. The pain in my hand lingered, as it did in my neck and back from leaning over to engrave the lino, long after I finished. I experienced how it feels to make every cut, to understand viscerally, bodily, the minutes and hours that go into it. You become intimately connected with that object, with that lino and that shoe. You gain what Sennett (2008, p.119) has called "material consciousness": a deep awareness and understanding of the thing you are working with. Ingold (2012, p.1) has elaborated: "To know things you have to grow into them, and let them grow into you, so that they become a part of who you are". This, then, is making as thinking, knowing through doing, transformation. Through engraving and printing the shoes the maker gains intimate knowledge of the object, and learns about and connects to the owners of those shoes, their relative who disappeared, and their search.

In the improvisation and development of engraving and printing the soles of shoes, the Colectivo Huellas de la Memoria has developed technique. The hands of those

who work with these shoes learn from them, through their materiality, something of who their owners are and where those shoes have been. There is a connection and a material consciousness that comes about from touching an object, getting to know each crack and texture, through the process of engraving and printing. In Huellas de la Memoria, making certainly is thinking. Paying attention to the details of what takes place when making, of understanding how the footprints come into being, reveals other aspects and elements to how this project works as memory, and what we understand about the search for the disappeared. It also reveals connections between ourselves, our contexts, and material things.

Translating

I now want to turn from exploring the materiality of the shoes and the process of making, to the social lives of the shoes and prints, and the directions Huellas de la Memoria has developed in. One aspect of the shoes and the project in general is translation. They translate stories, pain, empathy, and solidarity; this is translation as expressing a sense of something, which enables comprehension. But other types of translation are also at play: the conversion of something or someone, a translation of form or medium. Sennett (2008, p.127) coined the phrase "domain shift" to refer to how a tool or approach designed for one purpose can be applied to another very different activity. The shoes have translated, transformed, have undergone such a domain shift; they have morphed from an object designed to protect feet, to a tool of communication, to an object that can, to some extent, speak (Daston 2004). But it is not only things that have undergone translation in this project. To some extent so have people: the relatives have become activists, the members of the collective have become experts in the soles of shoes.

Primarily, this project aims to bring attention to the problem of disappearance in Mexico and communicate to people what is happening. Alfredo drew on a tradition of lino and wood cutting and printing as a popular craft and political tool in Mexico. "Engraving can be a powerful way to denounce. Engraving also has this function historically, in Mexico and a large part of the world". For him, the project has a dual

function: "It's a project of memory, and a project of denouncing". The Colectivo Huellas de la Memoria (2018b) write:

> This is where our ethical commitment lies; it is not us who produce an object to represent the loss, uncertainty, frustration, or fury that is left behind after the disappearance of a loved one. What we do is recover an object that has been working and is the product of the act of searching for justice and truth: the shoes of the men and women searching. By recording the details of the search in the shoes we help turn them into an object of living memory....The shoes of the men and women searching, as an object, materialise the subversive practice through which they reclaim their dignity and that of the disappeared person, against the tide of the media and government who insist on criminalising the victims and their families for searching for them.

In her 2004 book *Things That Talk*, Lorraine Daston explores several objects that are eloquent, objects that become charged with meaning without losing their solid materiality. She dismisses the assumption that things are mute, explaining (2004, p.9) she is seeking to "make things eloquent without resorting to ventriloquism or projection". To her, even though they may not literally speak, things press messages, which are delicately adjusted to context, onto audiences. She explains (2004, p.20),

> Shifting attention from being to becoming can undermine seemingly obvious assumptions about thingness. One of the most thing-like properties of prosaic things is sharp outlines: it belongs to the essence of things to be neatly circumscribed; we know where one leaves off and the next begins.

Instead of being prosaic, instead of being stable, instead of having one constrained meaning, things can talk. Furthermore, things, composites of different elements, straddle boundaries and so blur outlines (Daston 2004, p.21). Alfredo sought to harness this capability of things, in this case shoes. To him Huellas is not an art project; the shoes once engraved do not become mute artefacts. More important is that they talk, that they share the stories of what they have experienced and where they have been. "What's important is the message. And that it can be read and understood". In this context, the role of the maker, the engraver, is to help translate the story, pain,

and emotion of the owner of the shoes, enabling those lives and experiences to be more visible.

One way Huellas has translated aspects of disappearance and searching is through using different colours for the prints. The majority of the shoes are printed in green: green for the hope of finding the disappeared, in fact inspired by the use of green thread by FUNDENL when they began embroidering handkerchiefs, explored in Chapter 5 (López Casanova 2016). But, when he first began the project Alfredo printed the first few pairs of shoes in black, the colour he most commonly used for lino cuts. Letty's shoes, for example, were originally printed in black, and then these and a few others were reprinted in green once he had received feedback from relatives and decided to change them. However, black paint is still used, now reserved for the shoes of people who have succeeded in their search and found their disappeared relative, dead:

> My name is Sócorro. I searched for my son Isaac Rico Arias since the 12 February 2012 in Veracruz. The search was relentless. His father died of sadness in May 2012. He was disappeared for four years and was found and identified in a mass grave in February 2016. I now have him back home, but not how I wanted (Footprints of Memory 2018b; Figure 38).

Some shoes have now been printed in red, used for people who have themselves been murdered while, and because of, their searching. And finally, the Collective have recently had the opportunity to print some shoes in orange. They explain:

> Green for hope.
>
> Black for pain.
>
> Red for rage.
>
> We have been thinking a lot about the colour for finding someone. What colour could we use when we were able to tell the story of someone who survived the horror of enforced disappearance? After exploring and thinking we decided on orange.
>
> Orange for joy. (Footprints of Memory 2018c).

Figure 38: Printing the first pair of black *huellas*, the Huellas' studio, Mexico City.

This project is of course about memory, and in this sense the shoes serve to translate experiences of disappearance and searching, as well as information about how and when the person was disappeared. Once this information is inscribed into the shoes and in turn printed, it is recorded. This is the sense of duration and durability that we find in objects, discussed in the previous two chapters. It is their perceived capacity to endure time, as opposed to our personal and ephemeral memories of these events, which is crucial to its memory function (Hallam and Hockey 2001, p.48). But they also somehow hold within them, as objects, memory of the search. There is another dimension to this sense of material permanence and the ability of the shoes and prints to tell the story of their owner. One relative confided in Alfredo that they feel that if they do not find their child, at least the footprint exists (López Casanova 2016). I saw this sentiment phrased slightly differently in another context. At an event I attended where relatives of the disappeared discussed memory, one mother demanded, "What's going to happen to Alejandro [her disappeared son], when me and my husband die? We need memory. Who will take up the fight?" (El 77 2016). This is one aspect of the power of these objects, of these shoes and prints. Like the *pañuelos* of Bordando por

la Paz, in their materiality they will remain, they testify, they can translate information and emotion for years to come.

Alfredo was clear he wanted to work with an object that belongs to the relatives who are searching, rather than any objects owned by the disappeared person. As explored in Chapter 6, things that belong to someone who is disappeared become highly emotionally charged, and they are often preserved or wait for their owner to return. The ways in which the shoes of a disappeared person, for example, could be treated and the journeys they could make would be distinctly different to the shoes of the searching relative. Alfredo felt that the victims of disappearance were being represented in other projects, and instead he wanted to tell the stories of the people he knew: the mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, brothers, sisters, and children searching. In this sense Huellas differs from Bordando por la Paz (Chapter 5): although both projects use slow methods of craft to rehumanise and tell personal stories of violence, rather than focus on the victims, Huellas tells stories of resistance. And because they are the shoes of the person who is searching, fighting, the shoes can become an extension of this; they need to travel, testify, and translate.

There is another object in this project that I have only briefly touched on so far, and that is the letters that arrive with the shoes. The letters, tucked into a shoe, are often longer than what is transferred onto the shoes, for reasons of space on the sole. They tend to introduce the person who wrote the letter, followed by details of who they are searching for and when and how they were disappeared. And then often the letter addresses the person who is absent, with words about how they are missed and what life searching for them has been like. These elements tend to be transferred onto the shoes, staying as true to the letter as possible, and convey the pain experienced by those searching. Yet the letters also, in their materiality, convey more than simply the words. They are handwritten, and therefore like the shoes have an intimate physical connection to the person who wrote them. Their hands held the paper and pen, and in some moment of contemplation or haste scribbled down the words to tell their story. The letters are less visible objects in this project, and I read through many of them temporarily stored in a folder, while Huellas developed and ideas for how to incorporate them were considered (Figure 39).

Figure 39: Folder of letters that arrive with the shoes, Huellas' studio, Mexico City.

Beyond the words printed from the soles, the shoes themselves as objects and in their materiality share many aspects of the stories of their owners. The shoes arrive from across Mexico from contexts that vary enormously, and the group tries to preserve and respect the condition they arrive in. Those which are caked in mud are treated most carefully as they tell the story of relatives who are searching in the countryside for clandestine graves, which will be explored in the following chapter. Alfredo described a pair of muddy work boots: "I'm interested in these boots, that are from a guy from Los Otros Desaparecidos, who's searching for graves". And the type of shoe, whether a *huarache* (a leather sandal worn and made by indigenous Mexicans) from Guerrero, a cowboy boot from Sonora, or a court shoe from Nuevo León, tells us something about the social and cultural context within which that person lives. I asked Letty Hidalgo about the shoes she gave to Alfredo to explore his initial idea with. She said they were not the shoes she wore most often, but they are, to her, the ones she searched for Roy in: heeled black court shoes, the shoes she would wear to go to meetings with government institutions and organisations demanding they search for her son and carry out criminal investigations.

Not only do the shoes tell of the context from which they came and the story of the search they have been in but, like the letters, they have had an intimate relationship with their owner. The shoes protected their feet, have been to government offices and clandestine graves, have marched in protest. We saw in Chapter 6 how meaningful objects are that enclosed bodies that are now absent (Hallam and Hockey 2001, p.211). These shoes have a presence of absence, as discussed in the previous chapter, not the absence of the disappeared person, but their searching relative. Alfredo explained,

> The country is in these shoes, walking from Baja California to Chiapas, Veracruz to Jalisco. Shoes worn down by the search, you can see the pressure of the person in them, in the soles, and can feel their pain. As an object, they represent everything, the search, the absence.

He described to me what he sees as their *ausencia contenida*, contained absence, where the shoes are worn down inside and the trace of the foot that was once there can be felt.

> This here, it's the physical weight of those who wore them, the wearers, and they are not there but they are there. The contained absence is the emptiness contained, full of solidity, in the worn-out parts. It's something paradoxical that the shoes continue walking in the physical absence of those who wore them. But they continue walking and denouncing for the owner of the shoes.

The shoes translate the search, they translate pain. The paradox is not only in the way the shoes continue to walk and denounce in the absence of the body, but in the way the absence of the foot is so present it is almost felt, almost solid. What is curious, however, is that despite all the ways the shoes translate and communicate, although they can talk, somehow this alone was not enough. The testimony had to be inscribed on the soles, the story needed to be readable, the individual person visible, and clarified with paint and brushes, for the translation to be effective and for the traces of the search to be seen.

The shoes and their prints convey the traces of people, places, absence, and loss, which they testify to. And not only have these elements been translated, but so have the shoes themselves, as have those who engraved them. Alfredo and those who

engrave the soles have become knowledgeable in the material qualities of the shoes and intimately connected to their owner. Huellas de la Memoria, then, is a process of multiple translations. Alfredo commented, "It's very powerful the phrase, no? "I want you to know I will not tire until I achieve it, if it costs me my life". Here there is a lot of pain. Much much pain....Sometimes it's hard to say things. I try to say it but, sometimes it's easier in the shoes".

Connecting

The project Huellas de la Memoria, then, in the materiality of the shoes, prints, and letters, and through the process of making, translates aspects of the experience of disappearance, and in turn the shoes themselves and those who work with them are in some ways translated, transformed, also. However, these objects do not simply communicate, but create and enable connections. Huellas is not just a process of sharing information and stories that may foster empathy, but creates communities and networks that strengthen the translation.

In the context of objects which belong to someone who has passed away, Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey (2001, p.50) describe, "it is not only the cultural production of the object and its physical properties that are significant, but also the unfolding social life of the object as it moves through time absorbing, or having impressed upon it, traces of its own history". The shoes contain traces of their history and where they have been, but once part of the project they have a new social life ahead of them. As with Bordando por la Paz, part of the impact of Huellas is a weaving of social fabric, of creating deep relations with others that work against the destructive and isolating forces of violence. Through the project connections have been made with and between relatives of the disappeared. Huellas de la Memoria has become a collective, and the shoes and prints have been exhibited across Mexico and Europe. But beyond these connections between people, the project, in its materiality, has visualised dimensions of disappearance and connections across time and space. The quantity of shoes now in the project, seen together, shows us paths that are not walked alone – they are well-trodden tracks – which in turn reveals the structural nature of the violence of disappearance.

Once Alfredo had engraved the first few pairs of shoes he posted images of them on Facebook, and interest in the project came from both people who wanted to help him with the work and relatives who wanted to give him their shoes. Huellas is only possible, and has grown, because Alfredo was already supporting and walking alongside relatives of the disappeared. He explained, "I am close to the families, before this project I was working on things with them. And when I had this idea there was enough trust and relationship for me to say look, I have this idea, can you lend me a pair of shoes to test this idea". He tries to have a face-to-face meeting with every relative that gives their shoes to the project; he explains the idea and they decide if it is something they see value in. He described this to me as a dialectical relationship, that he could not do the project if there was not collaboration between him and the relatives. Alfredo explained, "the most important thing with the project is that I am constructing relations with the parents....this adds value to the project. It's something moral. It's one way they appreciate it". He is walking, searching, and denouncing, alongside them.

His original idea was for this to be a project that responded to the violence of the Calderón presidency and the war on drugs, but as it developed he saw that it could and should be opened up in several directions: to relatives of people who disappeared in Mexico since the dirty war, and to relatives from other countries. He explained, "I didn't know all these people, I knew a few in Monterrey, Coahuila, but most I have found in the journey. It's part of the project to walk alongside people". As well as people contacting him to participate, as it developed he sought out relatives who represent certain dimensions of the problem of disappearance that he wanted to include. For example, every year a caravan of mothers from Central America, whose children disappeared in Mexico while migrating to the United States, come to Mexico to search for their children. In 2015 Alfredo decided to approach them when they were in Mexico City and see if anyone would be interested in giving him their shoes. He explained, "I took two pairs of shoes in good condition because I knew they would be wearing the only ones they had, and I said, look if anyone wants to exchange their shoes with these let me know". Priscilla, from Honduras, gave him her shoes. She had only just bought them, and she told him,

> I bought these because I wanted to search the whole of Mexico in one pair, searching for my daughter, Yesenia, she was heading to the US to look for work, and disappeared in Tamaulipas. So she said look I have these shoes, I like your project, I think it's necessary, so let's exchange.

She took the shoes he had brought so she could continue walking. Since then Colectivo Huellas de la Memoria has organised a donation of shoes to swap with the mothers in the caravan, to include the international aspect of disappearance in Mexico and how it affects vulnerable migrants, and to support those mothers.

As well as enabling connections with and between relatives of the disappeared, Huellas, as mentioned, became a collective of people, rather than the work of one artist. From the first time we met Alfredo was looking for ways to do this. He said, "I'm going to open it, but with who is the important thing....Responsibility and respect is important....It's not a factory. I have done twenty, thirty, it's not about speed nor about a factory nor a competition, what we're doing has a content". The process, doing the project in a way that brings people in and makes connections, is more important than speed or quantity, output or end goal. In the months I followed the project it was organically moving towards being a collective. A few other people also took lino and shoes home to engrave like me, and it became the case that each time I would visit the studio there would be other people there as the project gained attention. There were people like myself who saw value in it and wanted to assist, relatives who had participated in the project with their own shoes who came to engrave those of others, and journalists, photographers, and filmmakers who came to document the process.

At some point Alfredo decided it would be better to put aside a day a week when we could all come together and engrave and print collectively. The project was at that point taking over his life emotionally and practically, and he needed to find a way to share the burden of it. He explained to me he wanted "to start speaking of 'us' rather than 'me' when talking about the project" (Figure 40). Over the group sessions I attended, I connected with the lives of the people whose shoes I worked on through touch, materiality, and engraving their shoes. And the people in the room connected also. At the same time as the project was developing and growing in the studio in Mexico City it was growing online. The Facebook page for Huellas de la Memoria is

still the primary space for communicating the project, but in addition mirror Facebook pages in different languages have been set up. I began the page Footprints of Memory, and there are versions in Italian, French, German, and Japanese. Every time a new pair of shoes and footprints is added to the Spanish page, they are posted on the mirror pages with a translation of the text.

Figure 40: A group engraving session, Huellas' studio, Mexico City.

I watched the collection of shoes and prints steadily grow over these months, and in many ways become a dynamic archive representing the problem of disappearance in Mexico. This struck me one day when I arrived to the workshop and the shoes had been put into boxes, labelled and numbered. That day Alfredo used the boxes to talk through the examples of disappearance for some journalists, reaching for a shoebox as if in a storeroom, each one containing a painful story. What was overwhelming, however, was not simply the quantity of shoes lining the wall, but that in the quantity the scale and character of the problem of disappearance was in some way visible. I had watched disappearance materialise in that studio, and watched the project come to reflect it in its temporalities and spatialities. There were the shoes of Braulia Jaimes

from Guerrero, searching for her husband Epifanio who, in 1969, was the first recorded case of enforced disappearance in Mexico (Ibarra 2009). Another pair belongs to Tita Radilla, searching for her father Rosendo who disappeared in 1974 also in Guerrero, which is the only case of enforced disappearance in Mexico to have reached the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (PBI 2018). There are shoes from Fernando Ocegueda, searching for his son Fernando who was disappeared in Baja California in 2007, and who, in searching for his son, revealed the location where around 300 bodies were dissolved in acid on the outskirts of Tijuana (Pie de Pagina 2017b). And from Araceli Rodríguez from Michoacán, the mother of Luis Ángel León Rodríguez, a federal policeman who was disappeared in 2009 along with six other officers and a civilian (CMDPDH 2018). Present are the shoes of Graciela Pérez, whose thirteen-year-old daughter Milynali disappeared on a stretch of highway in Tamaulipas with two cousins and an uncle in 2012 (Geografía del Dolor 2018). There are several pairs from parents and children of the forty-three Ayotzinapa students, and international cases are also represented from Central America as mentioned, but also from Argentina and Colombia. In the archive of shoes we can see disappearance as a structural issue that, although contextual, affects people across nations, class, gender, time, states; the connections of the violence are revealed.

A great quantity of shoes and footprints is not necessarily more powerful than seeing one pair alone, yet the visibilisation of the scale of the problem through the project, its temporalities and spatialities, demonstrates the comprehensive and connected nature of disappearance in Mexico. The owners of the shoes are not the victims of isolated and unfortunate events, but something widespread and connected. In seeing the collective, we can see patterns of disappearance that counter the dominant criminalising discourse for victims, discussed in Chapter 5, which blames individuals rather than allow a systemic problem to be recognised. Alfredo explained,

> It's symptomatic as well because where most shoes come from demonstrates where the most delicate situation is. There are shoes from Guerrero, from Tijuana, from Tamaulipas, Jalisco, Monterrey. Where they flow from, in an organic or natural way, where they flow from the most is where the situation is most complicated.

But he is also aware of the silences that seem to be emerging, from states like Zacatecas and groups such as women who have disappeared, which seem

underrepresented in the project. Some structures that hide aspects of violence are yet to be overcome, and in the project they are paying attention to these barriers.

These footprints also visibilise aspects of the search. The shoes contain traces of the spaces they have been to, the offices and morgues and mountains they have walked looking for the disappeared. Ingold (2010) explored walking as a process of knowing, how we learn as we walk through the weather-world. He (2010, p.128) writes,

> Although the movement of walking is continuous, each footfall makes a separate impression. For the path to appear along the ground as a continuous line it must be walked many times, or by many people, so as to iron out the incidence of individual treads. On many surfaces, the traces left by these treads are so subtle as to be barely visible. Sometimes they leave no trace at all.

The searching relatives leave subtle traces in the spaces they have walked, searching. They are wearing down their shoes and wearing down a path. In the Huellas relatives often express that they are following the footsteps of the disappeared; that their footprints combine with those of the person they are searching for. Ingold (2010, p.129) explains that footprints can be relatively ephemeral; that in the weather-world they are washed or worn away. But the footprints of Huellas are resisting this natural erosion; they are claiming a space to be remembered and acknowledged. And in their persistence, we can see the paths and tracks of disappearance and searching, we can connect these spaces:

> While a trained eye and touch can read much from a single footprint, even more can be read from a series of prints. Such a series, observed in sequence, comprises a track. If the same track is trodden often enough, the many individual prints merge into a continuous path. One cannot, then, read individual movements from a path, but only those commonly or collectively made (Ingold 2010, p.129).

Although no longer worn on feet, the shoes and their prints continue walking; they have travelled around the world translating and connecting. Alfredo was clear from the beginning that Huellas was not to be seen as a fine art project, not for galleries or museums in the formal sense. He explained, "Even if it goes to museums or galleries it's not to be thought of like that. If it starts to move round the art world like an object

of art, we need to think about this....I never want it to be thought of as an artwork". He added, "for others memory is something dead, for a museum, but for us no. For us it's an alive memory accompanying justice". In the months when I was getting to know the project it was building up to its first exhibition, at the Museo Casa de la Memoria Indómita in the centre of Mexico City, which was explored in Chapter 3. Alfredo explained to me, "I would like to do an exhibition that confronts, and here [the Museo Casa de la Memoria Indómita] it would a lot". As explained in Chapter 3, the temporary exhibition space at the Museo Casa follows on from their permanent exhibition on disappearance since the dirty war, so Huellas exhibited in this space connected the narrative of disappearance in Mexico by demonstrating continuity from the late 1960s until the present.

When we first met, Alfredo's expectation was to have thirty to forty shoes and prints for the exhibition. In the end eighty-five were included. The shoes were hung on string from rails in three rows and filled the large room, with the corresponding mounted prints on the floor below each pair. They were hung so that all of the shoe, the shoe and the sole, could be seen, and were placed in chronological order by disappearance. At the end of the third row were two black *huellas* for people who were no longer missing. And on the back wall of the room was a small fourth row with five pairs of children's shoes. The shoes and prints were installed over a few days, along with a timeline of disappearance in Mexico, some information about the project, and a photograph of one of the letters (Figure 41). The exhibition was inaugurated on the evening of 9 May 2016, the night before Mother's Day when relatives from across the country travel to Mexico City to join in the Marcha por la Dignidad Nacional.

Figure 41: Installing the exhibition at the Museo Casa de la Memoria Indómita, Mexico City.

Relatives and others began to arrive for the inauguration while we were still securing the footprints to the floor and the displays to the walls, so they joined in. They cut and mounted the prints, placed them under the corresponding shoes, tidied the room and swept the floor, preparing it to be formally opened. But they also went to find their shoes, touch them, look at the others, and they told us their stories of disappearance and search while we worked. The inauguration event was held in the open courtyard below the exhibition space and was full; around 120 people were sat in the chairs, standing to all sides and spilling onto the street, and had filled the balcony above (Figure 42). The majority were relatives of the disappeared, and then those who accompanied relatives and the project: journalists, academics, human rights defenders, artists, musicians, students and others. On a small stage in the courtyard people representing the Museo Casa and Huellas de la Memoria addressed the audience. Others read poetry and performed music, and several relatives took the stage to share experiences. First the relatives, then the press, then everyone else were invited to see the exhibition. The inauguration was a chance for most of the relatives

who had participated in the project to see the shoes and prints in person for the first time. I watched people find their shoes, take photographs with them, and tell their story to those of us nearby. A combination of overwhelming sadness and strength, as well as pride in the project and to be represented, was tangible in the room that night.

Figure 42: Inauguration of Huellas de la Memoria at the Museo Casa de la Memoria Indómita.

Several months later I asked Letty Hidalgo what she thought of the exhibition. She could not be at the inauguration but visited a few days later with Alfredo. She explained that she entered the room and was overwhelmed, overcome by tears. She had seen the images so many times, and was the first person to trust in the project and participate, but was not prepared for how it would feel to see them all together (Hidalgo 2016a). In the moment of seeing a material representation of the collective, mass problem of disappearance, its scale is felt and known viscerally. Although eighty-five shoes are just a fraction of the now almost 37,000 disappeared, they are enough to see that this is a systemic problem that has affected families for decades across the country. For relatives like Letty, to enter the room can be to feel, although

already cognitively knowing, that they are not alone in this experience; they can see they are connected to each other in the search, and to a problem that is shared by many others.

At the inauguration I asked several people what they wanted to happen to their shoes now, and all replied they wanted the shoes to keep travelling, to keep moving round, to keep testifying. As Alfredo also commented, "after the Museo Casa if they go to one place or another, they are completing their mission, no?" In the months that have passed since this exhibition I have seen photographs that show how relatives have placed images of their footprints in public places relevant to their searches, photographs of the project have been displayed as part of a temporary exhibition on Avenida Reforma in Mexico City (CDMX 2018), and the shoes and prints have been exhibited in many cities and venues across Mexico and Europe. They are an extension of the relative; the person can search in one place, and their shoes can testify and denounce in another. The first time I went to his studio Alfredo told me he intended to return all the shoes to their owners. "I look after them for them, these are shoes that have been walking and searching. I hope to return all the shoes that have been lent to me in the project. Its not an object I want to keep, it's only a medium....What will stay with me is an image, the photo". This sentiment has not changed, the shoes still belong to their owners, but it now seems clear the shoes will be continuously travelling, denouncing disappearance in Mexico to people across the world.

Like Bordamos por la Paz, Huellas de la Memoria began as a way to do something, a way to respond to the violence that has and continues to engulf the country. But it has organically developed and grown, as Alfredo explains:

> It's a project with a general idea, it started with a general idea but I didn't know it would include shoes from the seventies, I didn't know I was going to cross paths with a central American mother, with a boy who was searching for his grandparents in Argentina. So it's a project that has a basic idea, but I didn't know either it would have the mirror pages. There are some projects that are defined, this one, no. It started with a basic idea, and it's advancing and getting better. The perspective and idea of memory is maintained, but it's amplifying, in various ways, as it finds people, with the same interests.

In this way the project is dynamic and alive, it is creative and is responsive to the changing context of disappearance but also to how it is received and understood. The quote from Richard Sennett that begins this chapter suggests that sometimes, even when we cannot yet see the bigger picture or fully understand a situation, if we start to engage in a project that makes and explores material things, we often learn. He (2008, p.128) said, "Many propositions that seem counterintuitive are not so; we just don't know their connections yet. Plodding craft labor is a means to discover it". Through using hands to make material things, and through the stories and emotions those things translate, we can understand connections between those things and ourselves, between people, and between different spaces and times.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have examined one memory project in detail, Huellas de la Memoria, exploring how it came about and has developed. Throughout the chapter is a focus on the material; how the material components and qualities of the shoes, paint, paper, tools, and prints also shape the ways the project is experienced and understood. I examined the process of engraving and printing the shoes in detail, through paying attention to the materiality of the project and the sensory practice of the maker. The project developed organically through a co-production of the materials and the makers, through the interventions of hands and through material consciousness.

I then looked at two aspects of the social life of the shoes and prints. However, their social life is not disassociated from the process of their becoming, but very much shaped by it as, in turn, this becoming was shaped by the social life of the shoes before they became *huellas*. The first of the two aspects of their social life is translation. The shoes talk; they tell the stories of their owners and who they are searching for, both through the words engraved into them and in their materiality itself. They contain traces of the places they have been and the things they have witnessed. The second is connecting: the shoes and footprints connect people to things, things to other things, and people to people. Huellas has created communities of people; in the collective that now exists, in bringing relatives together, and in the way they are now travelling around the world. But they also reveal the connections of

the spatialities and temporalities of disappearance. The shoes, as a collection which keeps growing, show where disappearance is taking place, show that it is a problem with connections across country and state borders, show that it reaches across decades, classes, races, genders, and ages. And we can see, through the shoes and their footprints, that these separate footprints, vulnerable to the weather-world, have become well-worn tracks where many have gone before, and now are travelling together.

In this project, then, disappearance is revealed not as a series of unfortunate events but a sustained and systematic phenomenon founded on structural impunity and violence. These discussions, building on the process of re-making and re-humanising in Bordando por la Paz, on the intimacy of objects in the presence of absence, and the dispersed experience of living in a memoryscape, lead us to the following chapter: The Search. In the search material objects, human remains, memoryscapes, maps, processes of learning and gaining expertise, translation and transformation of people and things, complex connections and relations, come together in the actions undertaken by relatives of the disappeared to find their disappeared and to seek justice.

Chapter 8: The Search

The examinations and explorations in this thesis have built to examine the search for the disappeared undertaken by their relatives. Although at first glance far from what we would see as memory or memorialisation, it is perhaps the most important element of living in the wake of disappearance, certainly for the relatives themselves. It can be this simple; if disappearing someone is an act that tries to forget a person, an attempt at erasure, then to find them is to resist this, it is to remember them. Furthermore, any examination of the actions of relatives of the disappeared, including memorial or commemorative ones, should be thought about in dialogue with the search. The thing of primary importance to relatives, the thing that their lives become, is an ongoing search for the disappeared – their children, partners, parents – who have been taken. But in the search, in examining its twists and turns, its encounters and paths and structures, we find ideas and objects discussed throughout this thesis. The traces of presence.

Searching for the disappeared is an act that keeps them in the present present and resists actions which place them in the dead past. The search itself, spatially, takes place within memoryscapes; it takes people to spaces and places where their relative has been and where traces of them remain. Relatives follow in the footprints of the disappeared and these locations can be mapped. Searching for the disappeared is a demonstration of restoring personhood and resisting the dehumanising and criminalising narratives. It seeks to bring back together bodies and names, to re-construct identity and re-make worlds. Searching is a practice of *esperar* – to wait, to hope, to expect. The disappeared will return home, home is waiting for them. And the contradictory behaviour that ambiguous loss enables is again seen in the search: relatives hold the capacity to both search for them alive and search for them dead. Material things in the search can speak and communicate. As engravers become experts in shoes, relatives become legal, human rights, and forensics experts, they transform. And in the search relatives find each other and see they are part of a structural problem. These connections and others will be explored in this chapter.

In Mexico, it is associations and organisations of relatives of the disappeared and those that accompany them, who drive advancement on issues of disappearance, including searches. There are now nationwide more than fifty relatives' associations searching for the disappeared (Hidalgo 2016a). Relatives are raising the profile of the crisis nationally and internationally, developing laws, participating in memory work and, above all, leading the searches for their missing and the investigation of those responsible. In recent years, across the country relatives have taken a turn in the path, and have begun to search for bodies and graves alongside their searches for their missing loved ones alive. In much the same way as making was a process of thinking in Huellas de la Memoria, while walking paths and following traces, in the search relatives have gained knowledge. They are understanding their position and the wider context they find themselves in, and they are learning the skills that they need to search. As we saw in Chapter 4, Tim Ingold suggests walking is a process of thinking and knowing. He proposes (2010, p.121, emphasis in original),

> Knowledge is formed along paths of movement in the weather-world...By *becoming knowledgeable* I mean that knowledge is grown along the myriad paths we take as we make our ways through the world in the course of everyday activities, rather than assembled from information obtained from numerous fixed locations.

In the searches for the disappeared undertaken by relatives we see transformations of people, and gain an understanding of the issue and the world that this painful process exposes. Along these paths associations of relatives of the disappeared began to form and connect; they found each other in the search and strengthened the burgeoning movement for justice.

In their work on missing persons in the UK, Hester Parr et al. registered several of these connections. In their research (2016, p.67-72) they saw the search as a transformative and transforming process, and they considered the continued search for the person to be a practice of re-presencing them. They saw how searching practices often drew on intimate knowledge of the personal geographies of the missing person, involving "remembering and retracing their usual routes and routines, but also more in-depth and emotive appraisals of 'where matters' to the missing person and why" (Parr et al. 2016, p.70). In Mexico, this tracing and retracing takes relatives across the country to places that might be where they had been, but also to spaces and forums of

the state. Descriptions of searching are often a roll call of locations: the federal prosecutor, the state prosecutor, the public ministry, human rights commissions, morgues, hospitals, asylums, prisons, police stations, military barracks, cartel safe houses, brothels, highways, deserts, mountains, rivers, scrub land. Beyond these geographies is a materiality to the search, which involves a constant interaction and relation with mobile phones, paperwork, documents and records, objects that belong to the disappeared person, maps, photographs, drones, tools for excavating, and human remains. Searching for the person is a constant engagement with spaces and things.

This chapter, therefore, follows three sections. Firstly, I explain in detail the scale of the problem, and why it is that the relatives themselves have to conduct the search. That is, the structural, institutional, and social barriers that prevent a basic search for the disappeared and criminal investigations from being carried out by the correct authorities. Secondly, I explore the search for the disappeared in the initial days, weeks, and months after the disappearance, to demonstrate through one case the sorts of actions relatives undertake and the skills they develop. This demonstrates how much they transform in this process, how much they learn, analyse, and articulate. And finally, I focus on the recent turn in the search for the disappeared, to look at how relatives are now conducting searches for clandestine graves and human remains. They are engaging in citizen-led forensics (Schwartz-Marin and Cruz-Santiago 2016b), challenging the boundaries of expert and grieving relative.

The state of the search

> *I will try to sketch a portrait of the intense search of these women to find their loved ones: the landscape they face, the health problems generated by enforced disappearance, the constant pilgrimage they make from office to office, not only to ask for reports on how the investigation is advancing, but to help with data, to give clues, to facilitate searches, to propose strategies, to personally check sheets of telephone calls*
>
> Irma Alma Ochoa Treviño (2016, p.141)

The experience of the disappearance of a relative in Mexico is a nightmare; the search for them is a labyrinth of bureaucracy and insecurity. Mexican journalist Marcela Turati has spent years documenting the experiences of relatives of the disappeared. While sitting with a group of relatives, she recounts how each person described strategies that various representatives of the state had used to impede their search:

> ...They make you feel like they are doing you a favour, when it's a right...
>
> ...They open several registered files for the same case to tire us out and confuse us...
>
> ...They told me, Lady, don't look for them, the earth has swallowed them...
>
> ...They confront families with ideas and theories that contradict their advice...
>
> ...They say yes to everything we ask for, but in practice they deny it...
>
> ...They disappear files...
>
> ...They take people alone to excavations without preparing them, and halfway through they suspend the excavation; they're cruel...
>
> ...They say you don't have the right to open the coffin or say goodbye to your daughter, and so you are left doubting if she was the person you buried, or if she's still alive...
>
> ...They intimidate you for investigating, they say they will accuse us of usurpation of official functions...
>
> ...Their strategy is not only disappearance, it's also to deny justice...
>
> ...They're experts in going round in circles and doing nothing. They behave like fools... (Turati 2012, p.12).

The tactics described by these relatives, as well as larger structural and institutional barriers and social factors, impede searches for the disappeared. Therefore, to make any progress relatives are left with little choice but to drive the investigations forward themselves. In practice, relatives have three options; wait for the state to resolve the disappearance, collaborate with the state to resolve it, or leave the state to one side completely (Verástegui González 2016, p.157).

When someone is disappeared, their relatives enter into a maze of bureaucracy, going around in circles of meetings, paperwork, and hearings that exhaust and wear away at

their emotional and economic resources (Amnesty 2013; Human Rights Watch 2013; González 2014; Robledo Silvestre 2014; Betanzos Torres 2016; Cantú 2016; Díaz Fernández 2016; Verástegui González 2016; Chávez Hernández 2018). When someone disappears, if they are not too afraid, relatives try to report the disappearance with the state prosecutor's office, which is most commonly the institution with jurisdiction (Amnesty 2013). Law enforcement officers use several methods to avoid the formal registration of the disappearance. Most commonly relatives are told to wait seventy-two hours before the disappearance will be considered a case of missing persons (Amnesty 2013; Human Rights Watch 2013; Public Audience for the General Law on Disappearance 2016), implying no crime has taken place. Waiting in these crucial immediate hours has undoubtedly resulted in loss of information that could have found people or saved lives (Human Rights Watch 2013, p.5). Only those relatives who can provide immediate evidence of violent abduction by identified perpetrators are able to register a formal complaint (Amnesty 2013, p.11). For those who cannot, to simply register the disappearance can take months of persistent effort.

This is then complicated by the jurisdiction of institutions. Most commonly the state prosecutor should take on the case, however if relatives can present evidence of the involvement of organised crime, drugs, or federal agents in the disappearance, then the case is the responsibility of the federal prosecutor's office (Amnesty 2013, p.13). State prosecutors often assume the victim was involved in organised crime, which automatically means the case is not their responsibility. Relatives and cases get batted about various institutions in this manner, none of them taking on the case and investigating. Relatives go between meetings and file complaints with municipal police, state police, federal police, judicial police, state prosecutors, federal prosecutors, organised crime prosecutors, state human rights commissions, the national human rights commission, the victims support office Províctima, and state and federal courts (Amnesty 2013, p.13; Public Audience for the General Law on Disappearance 2016). If relatives are able to prove a case of enforced disappearance, and they manage to formally register the crime, then in theory a formal search for the missing person will begin immediately. However, in practice prosecutors and the police routinely fail to carry out basic investigative steps to search for those missing or investigate those responsible. Key evidence goes missing or is destroyed, other evidence is fabricated, glaring errors or omissions are made, there is no record of

investigations which are reported to have been carried out, relatives are asked for bribes to make advancements in investigations, and cases are simply left inactive or are archived so that no meaningful advancement is made (Amnesty 2013; Human Rights Watch 2013; Human Rights Watch 2014; Open Society Foundations 2016; Schwartz-Marin and Cruz-Santiago 2016b, p.68).

Another tactic the state employs in obscuring the continuity of violence and responsibility for these crimes is a wilful strategy of not knowing, not investigating. If investigations are continuously ongoing then an end point is never reached and they cannot be held responsible or need to deliver legal justice. Carlos Beristain of the Grupo Interdisciplinario de Expertos Independientes (GIEI, Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts), investigating the Ayotzinapa case for the Inter-American Human Rights Commission expressed this (GIEI 2016). He explained with Ayotzinapa the strategy of 'not knowing what happened' is part of the structures of impunity at play. Conversely, his colleague Francisco Fox explained the opposite was also at play. In the Ayotzinapa case the state gathered an enormous amount of information – documents, records, statements – but did not analyse it. This was handed to the GIEI, Fox believed, to overwhelm them with more information then they could possibly process in their one-year timeframe; another technique to inhibit their investigations (GIEI 2016).

Through complicity or omission, those responsible for combating the crime are those who create it, and are often the direct perpetrators (Amnesty 2013; Human Rights Watch 2013; Human Rights Watch 2014; Open Society Foundations 2016; Schwartz-Marin and Cruz-Santiago 2016b; Verástegui González 2016). Clearly, then, searching and investigating is dangerous for relatives of the disappeared, who are often threatened, harassed, and attacked by the police, prosecutors, and other persons (Amnesty 2013, p.12; Human Rights Watch 2013, p.7; González 2014; Public Audience for the General Law on Disappearance 2016). Between 2010 and 2017, eleven relatives have been murdered for their persistent investigation of a disappearance (Martínez 2017). Many are told if they continue to search other relatives will also disappear (Amnesty 2013; González 2014; Public Audience for the General Law on Disappearance 2016), but others are told by state prosecutors to carry out the investigations that the prosecutors themselves should be doing (Human Rights

Watch 2013, p.5; Human Rights Watch 2014, p.1). It is common for relatives to approach those they suspect of being involved in the disappearance of their relative for information, an act which is not only dangerous but through which many relatives find out that government officials are involved in organised criminal groups (Schwartz-Marin and Cruz-Santiago 2016b, p.67).

If a disappearance is registered, the two strands of investigation are separated, with the search for the missing person isolated from the investigation of the disappearance as a crime and the search for the perpetrators (Verástegui González 2016; Public Audience for the General Law on Disappearance 2016). Further complicating efforts, until very recently enforced disappearance was not recognised as a crime under the law of several Mexican states, despite Mexico having ratified the United Nations International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (United Nations 2007); in some states the crime simply did not exist (Amnesty 2013, p.10). Variations in law between bordering states particularly complicates the search, as state prosecutors and police do not coordinate work together (Public Audience for the General Law on Disappearance 2016). Until very recently in Mexico there were no national registers of disappeared persons, clandestine graves, nor unidentified bodies. Nor is there a national system for collecting DNA from unidentified bodies or relatives of the disappeared (Human Rights Watch 2014). There are currently 35,000 unidentified bodies in government morgues, common graves, and mausoleums according to the Secretaría de Gobernación (the Interior Ministry; Miranda 2018), and the Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos (CNDH, National Human Rights Commission) has registered 855 clandestine graves containing 1,548 bodies nationwide, between January 2007 and September 2016 (CNDH 2017).

If human remains that are found are sent to state laboratories to have a DNA sample taken, relatives have very little confidence in these laboratories or the state forensic anthropologists. In 2016 video footage emerged of a member of staff at the Institute of Criminal and Forensic Services of Nuevo León, saying she had orders from high above that a DNA result must be negative, and several other systematic errors in the way they work were recorded (Rea 2016). When handed a bag of bones, it is understandably hard to trust that the remains are the person you are searching for.

Underpinning this failed system is impunity; the likelihood of achieving legal justice for disappearance is pitifully low: in 2015 Mexico came second on the Global Impunity Index (Le Clercq Ortega and Rodríquez Sánchez Lara 2015). More than forty years have passed since the first political disappearance in Mexico and the authorities "continue investigating" the case (López Ovalle 2018, no page). Mexico's federal court has achieved six convictions for enforced disappearance in its history (Meyer and Suarez-Enriquez 2016) and "this legal lethargy is part of impeding access to justice, which contributes to or enables these crimes to go unpunished" (López Ovalle 2018, no page).

For many people, the search for their missing relatives becomes their life, as does the search for justice, and this has a huge impact on their social lives and worlds. The psychological toll of the search is significant. Facing and trying to overcome these barriers drains relatives of their economic and emotional resources. Relatives have frequently reported isolation and conflict from and within their families and communities, as people disagree over whether or how to search (Human Rights Watch 2013, p.7). Some families have more resources to search with than others; often the person who disappeared was the sole wage earner of a family, and families who rely on social services have their benefits taken away as they are conditional on employment (Human Rights Watch 2013, p7). Relatives are at times compelled to register the disappeared person as dead in order to access certain economic benefits (Human Rights Watch 2013, p.7), which in turn closes any missing persons investigations. Disappearance has a stigmatisation socially, where people are presumed to have been involved in criminal activity, guilty by being a victim. And a hierarchy of relatives can be felt and experienced, between those who can prove their relative was a victim of a crime committed by the state, and those who cannot, implying they may have been involved in organised crime. As Edgar Chávez Hernández (2018, no page), an academic and activist who supports relatives of the disappeared, describes, "It is the same in almost every case of disappearance in Mexico, this simulation [of a search] is a perfected practice that drip by drip undermines families". He explains (2018, no page) that the process of dealing with officials in the search is working with "administrators of pain" who, "through the logic of misinforming and obscuring the truth, of controlling those who search, have patented a praxis of fear: social isolation".

There has been some improvement to this failed system in recent years. Under pressure from relatives' associations and human rights organisations, in 2013 the Mexican government established the Fiscalía para Búsqueda de Personas Desaparecidas (Special Prosecutor for the Search of Disappeared Persons) to investigate cases of disappearance at a national level. However, this special prosecutor is poorly resourced; when established it took on 1,000 cases (of the then 27,000 registered), and was equipped with twenty-four civil servants and fewer than forty federal police (Betanzos Torres 2016; Díaz Fernández 2016, p.136). The budget for this Special Prosecutor in 2016 was thirty-four per cent lower than in 2014 (Meyer and Suarez-Enriquez 2016). In Nuevo León, a group of relatives of the disappeared and a human rights organisation worked to pressure the state and establish the Grupo Especializado en Búsqueda Inmediata (GEBI, Special Group for an Immediate Search, (CADHAC 2016, p.55)), but again the tangible achievements of this are limited.

In January 2018 the Ley General en Materia de Desaparición Forzada de Personas, Desaparición Cometida por Particulares y del Systema Nacional de Búsqueda de Personas (General Law on the Enforced Disappearance of Persons, on Disappearance Committed by Individuals, and the National System for the Search of Persons) came into force (Cámara de Diputados 2017; OHCHR 2018b). This law, which had been more than two years in the making, standardised the criminal definition of disappearance according to international law, assigned clear roles to different government bodies responsible for investigating, and established a national system and national commission for searching (Meyer and Suarez-Enriquez 2016; Cámara de Diputados 2017). Relatives across the country were invited to participate in a consultation for the creation of the law – I attended one forum at the Mexican Senate and have drawn on the testimonies I heard there for this chapter (Public Audience for the General Law on Disappearance 2016) – and relatives also lobbied for this law through the campaign Sin Las Familias, No (Without the Relatives, No (movimiento por nuestros desaparecidos en México 2018a)). The law has several flaws, such as no mechanism to investigate high-ranking officers accused of enforced disappearance, and still maintains a distinction between disappeared and missing persons, yet the main challenge that remains is to force its implementation (WOLA 2018).

There are, therefore, multiple failures on behalf of the state in regard to their responsibility to conduct investigations into the whereabouts of the disappeared person and the crime itself. Justice is rare and impunity reigns. Relatives, then, take on the search, facing multiple, complex, structural and social barriers. The scale of the task is immense and the process wears down emotional, social, and economical resources. But when relatives undertake this task the outcome is astounding. They study, investigate, and push on every possible path to find their missing. On this path they transform and they come together.

Traces of life

She, who went where Kristian had never been, searching the highways, in ministries, searching in the hours before dawn, with insomnia and pain on the slopes; she, who is where Kristian surely would have been

Raúl Márquez and Lourdes Huerta (2016, p.86)

As we have seen, when someone is disappeared in Mexico, more often then not their relatives immediately have to begin a search for them. This is a process of following traces, of gathering information, and making logical choices about what could have possibly happened. It is a transformation of their lives, as Marcela Turati (2012, p.106) describes,

> Since the moment their loved one does not return home relatives are transformed into nomads. Motivated by the laws of the heart, they cross the country combing state prosecutors' offices, highways, hospitals, prisons, morgues, cemeteries, vacant lots, and clandestine graves.

In this section I want to explore the immediate search when someone disappears, the comprehensive and informed investigations relatives undertake, and the ways they negotiate and begin to comprehend the world they find themselves in.

I am going to examine the experience of disappearance from the view of one relative, and the actions she took (and is still taking) to drive the search for her son. The story

of Letty Hidalgo and her son Roy Rivera, who we have seen in many chapters across this thesis, is extraordinary, but it is demonstrative of the path the search can take. I have heard Letty tell her story on several occasions (Hidalgo 2016a), and it is documented in books and articles from which I have also drawn (Lakhani 2013; Schwartz-Marin and Cruz-Santiago 2014; Outlook 2015; Diéguez 2016; Trial International 2018). Letty is happy for me to share her story here (Hidalgo 2018). She has transformed in the search; she has become a criminal investigator, legal expert, and activist. And, as we saw described through the shoes and footprints of Huellas de la Memoria in Chapter 7, Letty found other relatives in the search and saw what happened to Roy was part of a something bigger, with continuity over decades and beyond Mexico.

On the 11 January 2011 Letty was at home with her two sons, Roy who was eighteen and Ricardo who was sixteen, in a residential suburb of Monterrey, Nuevo León. Late that night, around 1am, while the three were each in their own rooms, they heard a loud noise they thought was gunshots, something that had become a common occurrence. They were mistaken. Instead, around ten armed men with their faces covered, some wearing police vests, had forced their way into the house. They covered Letty's head and kept her in her room apart from her sons, and began ransacking the house taking everything of value they could find – televisions, mobile phones, jewellery, and two sets of car keys – so Letty presumed it was a robbery. But the men then demanded to know which son was the eldest, and said they were cleaning up the streets for the Gulf Cartel. Once they left and Letty removed the cover from her head, she saw they had also taken Roy.

She ran to her neighbour's house with Ricardo and considered calling the army who she saw as more trustworthy than the police, but they were too afraid to turn on the lights and find the number so they stayed there and did not report the crime. Later that night they saw a local police patrol car approach and policemen enter her house that they had left open, then leave. The following day Letty received a call demanding a ransom for Roy and that she should not tell the police. She asked to speak to him before she paid it, so she could be certain they had him. On the 13 January they rang: the first person she spoke to was not her son, so the kidnappers called out "which one of you is Roy?" and Letty heard a reply, "Me, I'm Roy". He came to the phone, and

she asked him to tell her the date of his brother's birthday. He replied correctly and said, "Yes mum it's me. I love you". This was the last time Letty heard his voice. She paid the ransom but Roy was not returned and the kidnappers did not contact her again. Too scared to go to the police due to their probable involvement, three weeks after his disappearance she finally reported it to the army, but after a fortnight they stopped searching.

This is when Letty's search really began. The night of the disappearance the men who took Roy also took all the mobile phones in the house, so Letty got hold of their records from the networks and realised local and state calls had been made on them since Roy had disappeared. She plotted the calls and using the GPS of her phone that had been taken, found sixteen of the locations where it had been. Using Google Earth, she then gathered eighty photos of those locations. She was able to see where they likely had been sleeping, because that was when the phones were on for the longest periods of time in one place. She gave all this information to the army and on the 11 March 2011 the army searched just one of the houses she had recorded. Inside were three people who had been kidnapped and three kidnappers, as well as six stolen cars, a large number of guns, and torture implements. The three people rescued that day said that at one point there had been about twenty others there. After this incident, the army told Letty she had to go to the police and report his disappearance, and they did not search the other fifteen locations. Later that year one of Roy's kidnappers was arrested for driving one of Letty's stolen cars. He was sent to jail for the car theft, but was never investigated for Roy's disappearance. Letty wrote a letter to the office of then President Felipe Calderón asking for help with her search, but was told she had to continue to work with the state prosecutor's office in Nuevo León, who had done nothing to assist the search for Roy.

In Nuevo León at the time of Roy's disappearance the crime of enforced disappearance did not exist in state law (after campaigning, in December 2012 it was classified in the penal code of the state of Nuevo León (CADHAC 2016, p.55). She began the tiring process of going from office to office, to try to hold to account the institutions that should have been searching for Roy. As explained in Chapter 5, Letty began protesting weekly outside the Palacio Municipal in the Plaza Zaragoza with a couple of other people searching for a relative who had disappeared, and in 2012 they

began embroidering the names of their disappeared. After some months they founded Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Nuevo León (FUNDENL, United Forces for Our Disappeared in Nuevo León), and began to pool their resources, energy, and insights to search together. Letty sees the structural and institutional barriers that prevent cases from progressing as part of a method to drain the relatives of energy, and it works. This, she explained, is why relatives of the disappeared need each other and need to work as a group: while one person is low in energy, optimism, and health, others can pull forward. Together they appropriated the Plaza de los Desaparecidos seen in Chapter 3, have financed and fought for the excavation and identification of the daughter of one of their members (Huffschmid 2015; Schwartz-Marin and Cruz-Santiago 2016b), and have contributed to changing laws.

Letty was forty-nine years old and a teacher when Roy was taken. Her employer continued to financially support her in the short term, and once they realised that the weeks were turning into months, they helped her to process early retirement paperwork so she could commit herself to the search. Letty and the other members of FUNDENL have transformed in these journeys, as Letty's son Ricardo describes in a letter he wrote to Roy:

> And well mum, mum has changed completely. In fact I don't think you would recognise her, it's as if a veil has covered her face, you can notice the sadness from a distance, she is a tireless fighter. If you knew how many mayors, delegates, agents from the Public Ministry, soldiers, marines, sub-delegates, anti-kidnapping bosses, and ministers she has shouted in the face of. If you knew where she has been searching for you. If you knew Indira, Chuy, Cordelia, Martin, Marcela, Diana, Oscar, friends in this unending fight, friends who despite not knowing you, investigate, travel, accompany, and help so that you come back safely. If you knew how much mum loves them (Ricardo Rivera quoted in Martínez Roque et al. 2016, p.129).

Along the paths the searching has taken Letty she has found others, and in finding others and fighting together they are stronger. But they have also learned that the disappearance of their relative was not an isolated problem, but that they are caught up in something bigger, in a structural problem that has continuity in time and space.

They have learned from the experiences of others: "their teachers, their ancestors, their sisters" (Turati 2012, p.121): mothers in Colombia, Guatemala, Argentina, and from the *doñas* of Comité ¡Eureka!, the organisation that opened the Museo Casa de la Memoria Indómita seen in Chapter 3, whose relatives were disappeared during Mexico's dirty war. One relative explained to Turati (2012, p.122), "we learn from the experiences of everyone because, by understanding the phenomenon of disappearance, we move on from individual cases and begin to have a collective reflection that helps us to face the problem, and to move on from paralysis". In her search for Roy, Letty is forensically reconstructing what happened to him. She is going to meetings with the prosecutor and other institutions, while speaking to informants, gathering information, recording and creating archives, mapping organised crime networks, and following traces. This process is a practice of making Roy present, it forces us to recognise and acknowledge his existence, which is almost denied by the formal processes of search and investigation. Roy did not just disappear, and his mother is following in his tracks.

As with many other relatives' associations across Mexico in recent years, FUNDENL's searches have taken a turn. When I visited Monterrey in April 2016 I attended a fundraising event organised by FUNDENL. They hosted a comedy night in order to raise money to buy a drone to assist them in the search that was now taking them beyond the city to abandoned buildings and ranches and the barren countryside around Monterrey. Using local intelligence passed to them they are looking for human remains and clandestine graves. They are using spades and tools to sift through gravel and earth to find bones. And it is to this part of the search that I now want to turn; to the citizen-led forensic practices that are further challenging the boundaries of expert and lay knowledge, exposing state inaction and, in finding material human remains, are forcing us to question what identification and the end of disappearance means.

Traces of death

These days it is said we live in death camps....
Mexico has become an immense mass grave
Ileana Diéguez (2018, no page)

I want to now turn down a path that increasingly is being taken by people in the search for their disappeared relatives: the search for clandestine graves and human remains. In the past few years across the length and breadth of Mexico groups of relatives have begun to go out into rural and semi-rural areas around their cities and towns, with tools and techniques they have developed, to search for and excavate clandestine graves and human remains. This is a terrible turn, one that involves accepting that the person you love may not be alive, and may have been violently murdered and clandestinely buried. Turati (2012, p.112) describes how, for relatives of the disappeared to imagine the possibility of finding their child, sibling, or partner dead, "some enter a crisis. Several cry". Emotionally, this is not an easy path to take. But it is possible. So to not take it, in the face of the failure of a system to be accountable, leaves a path in the search unexplored.

This phase in the search has in most cases developed over time, as individual searches met dead ends and new ways forward had to be found. But it also catalysed across the country after a couple of relatives' associations began searches for graves and remains, and were successful. Others saw this, and decided this was the next step for them too. This turn is not as simple as a turn to search for the dead after an unsuccessful search for them alive. Despite searching for bodies and graves they have not given up hope, they still *esperar* (wait, hope, expect). These searches, which accept the possibility of death, continue alongside searches for life. This again is what Pauline Boss (1999; 2002) described; relatives are surviving ambiguous loss by holding the contradictory ideas that the disappeared may be alive, or may be dead. This contradiction is also present in the immediate aftermath of the disappearance, as relatives search public morgues and hospitals for the person who disappeared. To me, this search for the disappeared as dead as well as alive is pragmatic; these searches are successful, so to ignore this option is to not do everything possible to search. This section, then, is not a sharp break in the story of the search, but a continuation that took a turn in the path.

Disappearance violently disrupts a person's identity, which has to do with the separation of a body from its name (Gatti 2014; Ashby Wilson 2015; Edkins 2016; Moon 2016). The reattachment of these two, then, the wholeness that is created when

human remains are identified, is at first glance what is being sought in searching for bodies. Gabriel Gatti (2014, p.37) explains,

> If forced disappearance of persons destroyed identity, then archeologists rebuild it, they provide identity; if forced disappearance of persons occurred in that space – the clandestine center – then they reconstruct it and they reconstruct what happened in it....They go into the hole where the catastrophe occurred, where bodies were separated from names, where the disappeared became such. And they fill it.

However, it is usually so-called experts who take on this role of reconstruction and reconstitution.

According to many practitioners of forensic anthropology in transitional and post-conflict contexts, and to academics who write about these activities, the use of clandestine graves is inherently an act that attempted to erase and forget people (Ashby Wilson 2015, p.viii; Ferrándiz 2015; Ferrándiz and Robben 2015, p.1). Therefore, to discover and unearth these bodies, to reveal the 'truth', is inherently an act of memory, and one that opens up the possibilities for "political, judicial, scientific, symbolic, and commemorative processes that turn the opened mass grave into an anthropological field site" (Ferrándiz and Robben 2015, p.3). In this frame, finding the disappeared (dead or alive) seems to be about fixing the catastrophe, restoring order to the world, returning to how things were and moving forward, in space and time (Edkins 2003a, p.9; Gatti 2014, p.33). But for relatives of the disappeared in Mexico finding remains does not, at least not yet, assume these things. In Mexico it is not the state or independent international experts searching for the disappeared in an attempt to restore order and linear time. In Mexico relatives are searching for bodies and graves, fully aware that order is a veneer.

A simplistic interpretation of these relative-led excavations and forensic work would explain these as the actions of desperate people, so emotional and devastated by the disappearance of their relative that they are turning to search for graves. But this is not where their motivation comes from. These excavations are strategic; in revealing bones they are forcing people to acknowledge the problem, they are obliging the state to do its job, they are challenging impunity and the lack of justice, and also shaming governmental and non-governmental forensics practitioners for inaction (Turati 2012,

p.104; Huffschmid 2015; Schwartz-Marin and Cruz-Santiago 2016a; Schwartz-Marin and Cruz-Santiago 2016b). And in finding bodies and bones, if they are then identified, they are putting some relatives, if not themselves, out of the misery of living with ambiguous loss: "We all want to find them; this [searching for graves] is not ideal, but it is a way of searching and above all it will give peace to a family of a disappeared person" (Ortiz Solís 2016, p.182).

In the wake of the disappearance of the forty-three Ayotzinapa students in Iguala, Guerrero, a group of relatives of disappeared persons formed under the name Los Otros Desaparecidos (The Other Disappeared). These were not the relatives of the Ayotzinapa students, but of hundreds of other people who had disappeared in this small town. After the disappearance of the forty-three and all it revealed about police and government corruption, these relatives realised they could no longer rely on the state (Vergara, in Pie de Pagina 2017c). So, in November 2014, they began to hike into the hills around Iguala with spades, metal rods and small flags, to find recently disturbed soil, clothes and other signs of locations where people could be buried (Vergara, in Pie de Pagina 2017c). During their first search on 16 November 2014 they found eighteen bodies (Martínez 2015). By November 2016 the group had found 200 bodies and thousands of bone fragments (Pie de Pagina 2017c).

A few months later, on the 17 January 2015 and at the other end of the country, a group of relatives of the disappeared in Coahuila called Grupo VIDA (Víctimas por sus Derechos en Acción, Group LIFE, Victims for their Rights in Action), went to the arid *ejido* (communally owned land) Congregación Hidalgo de Matamoros, on their first search for remains (Rodríguez, F. 2016; Pie de Pagina 2017d). Since this first search Grupo VIDA have found more than 100,000 fragments of bone (Rodríguez 2018). And in Nuevo León FUNDENL have discovered a *narcorancho* (a ranch which was occupied by a drug cartel) from which 250,000 fragments of bone have been recovered (Diéguez 2018 no page). The horrific reality, which many relatives of the disappeared have come to accept, is that if they search for bodies and human remains, they will find them. The volume of names without bodies and bodies without names is overwhelming considering the numbers of disappeared in Mexico, the numbers of unidentified bodies lying in state morgues, and the quantity of remains relatives are finding.

To prepare for these searches, relatives of the disappeared have researched, studied, and practiced. They develop expertise by learning from one another. Guadalupe Contreras was an original member of Los Otros Desaparecidos in Iguala. As a profession he constructed tombs, excavated graves, and made gravestones, and with these skills he found he was extremely competent at finding and excavating clandestine mass graves (Martínez 2015). After working for some time with Los Otros Desaparecidos in Iguala, he was asked by Solecito Veracruz, a group of relatives of the disappeared in the state of Veracruz, to help them search for and excavate graves. Between November 2014 when he began these searches and February 2017, Guadalupe found 317 bodies in these two places: sixty-eight around Iguala and 249 in Veracruz on the Colina de Santa Fe ranch (Pie de Pagina 2017e). Since these searches began, some independent institutions have been supporting relatives to develop an intimate knowledge of human remains, forensic anthropology, and archeology, for example the Grupo de Investigación en Antropología Social y Forense (GIASF, Social Anthropology and Forensics Research Group) in Mexico City, that is organising workshops on forensic anthropology for relatives of the disappeared, including training with human bones and on archeological techniques (GIASF 2018a; GIASF 2018b).

Relatives are recognising a problem, seeing an opportunity, and equipping themselves with the knowledge, skills, and tools they need to face it. Another original member of Los Otros Desaparecidos, Mario Vergara, who organised their first search, explains:

> We are doing the job the government doesn't do. We are searching ourselves. I asked the EMAF (Equipo Mexicano de Antropología Forense, Mexican Forensic Anthropology Team) for support: "Please, send me books so that I can teach myself the protocols for when I find a corpse". I've read the protocols of the PGR (Procuraduría General de la República, Attorney General of Mexico) on how to exhume a corpse from a mass grave. I know what to do when you find a clandestine mass grave. I've read the Red Cross protocols. I've read books about human anatomy. I've read a lot. I also train every day. I have to exercise so I can hike in the hills....I had to take classes in how to abseil, because sometimes we descend into sinkholes and you have to

> abseil down. We've learned first aid because people have needed it when we were up in the hills. Now, little by little, I have bought my equipment to go into the hills. I've found snakes so I thought: "now I need protection from snakes". I have knee and elbow pads, a lamp, batteries, gunpowder. I bought a flint to light the gunpowder. I bought my abseil equipment. I bought my binoculars, my backpack which has a pouch for water, a compass, a GPS (Vergara, in Pie de Pagina 2017c).

These are not the actions of unskilled and unprepared citizens. These searches have been carefully organised using local knowledge and the practical skills of those who attend. Some relatives, with support from academics, are creating a database of their DNA, a bank that can be used for the identification of human remains, under the project Ciencia Forense Ciudadana (Citizen-Led Forensics 2018). Relatives have learned how to take samples of saliva to collect DNA, send these off to laboratories, manage the database, and give each relative who registers their unique DNA code. These relatives know what knowledge they lack and need to be successful, and so seek that information and learn those skills.

Building on these searches, in April 2016 a group of relatives of the disappeared from across the country came together in the first Brigada Nacional de Búsqueda (National Search Brigade) in Veracruz state. Relatives who had been searching for graves in Guerrero, Coahuila, Sinaloa, Chihuahua, Morelos and Baja California responded to a call from relatives in Veracruz for help (Brigada Nacional de Búsqueda 2016). These people had experience and knowledge of their terrain, which varies enormously from the mountains of Guerrero in the south to the deserts of Coahuila in the north. One of the aims of the Brigada was to establish permanent local search groups in Veracruz, and to share experience and concerns from the groups across the country to "outline a citizen's agenda that responds to the state's indolence and incapacity" (Brigada Nacional de Búsqueda 2016). This broad experience was brought together in the Brigada to Veracruz and during the fifteen-day trip they found fifteen locations with human remains.

The day the Brigada returned from Veracruz to Mexico City they held a press conference, which I attended, where they explained how they came together, what

they found, and their next steps. The Brigada, around forty people, stayed in a church protected by the local community who had invited them. One member of the Brigada explained,

> One of them [the relatives in Veracruz] said we had the trust of the community. In the whole region we felt huge support. I felt very protected being there, in the church with the Father, but above all the *pueblo* (the people, the community, the town) looked after us (Brigada Nacional de Búsqueda 2016).

Intelligence on where they should search was provided anonymously through the community and church. In addition to the human remains found, during this trip the Brigada recorded forty cases of disappearance that, "for fear or for omission by authorities, had not had the opportunity to seek advice, put pressure on or advance their investigations, or, in some cases, even to register the details of the incident" (Brigada Nacional de Búsqueda 2016). Although they documented forty cases, around seventy-five families came to them and told them of a disappearance, but thirty-five were too fearful to record it (Brigada Nacional de Búsqueda 2016).

In revealing bones, and revealing how easy it is to reveal the bones, relatives of the disappeared reveal the violence and the complicity of the state. The press release from the Brigada to Veracruz makes this point eloquently (Brigada Nacional de Búsqueda 2016):

> We are making a call out to Mexican and international society to turn and look at the tragedy that we are urgently highlighting in Veracruz and hundreds of points across the country, to demand attention on the disappearance of persons with due seriousness. Likewise, we are making a call to all families to join the searches and activities we will be organising next, to unite our forces, and as has been shown, provide results that we do not find at the desk of any indolent government office.

One member of the team explained, "Without technology, without capacity, without education, without money, we were showing the government that they lacked will. They say they search but don't find anything. We search and we find". Another declared, "Today it is clear that the only way for us to find our relatives is to do it ourselves" (Brigada Nacional de Búsqueda 2016).

These relative and citizen-led excavations and forensic knowledge production, what Ernesto Schwartz-Marin and Arely Cruz-Santiago (2016b) have called "forensic civism", are controversial in many forums. Scientists, academics, and national and international institutions have all criticised these excavations, arguing that without expert knowledge and equipment, relatives could damage evidence and hinder processes of identification and investigation: short-term gain at the expense of long-term answers or justice (Moon 2016; Mora 2016; Schwartz-Marin and Cruz-Santiago 2016a; Schwartz-Marin and Cruz-Santiago 2016b). The premise of forensic anthropology is that skeletons and human remains, and the sites they were found or excavated from, can be interpreted to tell the story of what happened to that person, which in turn can be used as evidence in a legal setting. It is forensic anthropologists who supposedly have the power to interpret the social significance of human remains and the sites of crimes, to make bones and other material remains 'speak' and testify (Moon 2013, p.155; Moon 2016). Cruz-Santiago (Schwartz-Marin and Cruz-Santiago 2016a, p.500) describes a conversation she had with a forensic expert from the Mexican government about the citizen-led searches. He said:

> Don't you see? Citizens cannot be involved in forensic science practices, they are there (moving his hands as drawing an invisible line) and we experts are here (pointing to where he was)...the words 'citizen' and 'forensic science' cannot be together in the same sentence.

This is a policing of roles and boundaries between grieving victims and rational experts. Relatives are seen as potentially contaminating to the site of excavation (Schwartz-Marin and Cruz-Santiago 2016a, p.500). A representative of an NGO that works with relatives of the disappeared in Nuevo León explained their position to me:

> We've spoken to groups of forensic experts on the subject, and they don't recommend it [citizen-led excavations]. You can affect the evidence....So we believe its better to investigate a case and indicate where to search, and then have experts in the subject to come....and the relatives or an organisation could come of course, but to do it all on their own as relatives, no we can't agree with that (Sánchez Reyna 2016).

Discussing the context of current excavations in Mexico, Franco Mora (2016, p.175), member of the Equipo Peruviano de Antropología Forense (EPAF, Peruvian Forensic Anthropology Team), explains the problem is to do with following the mechanisms and protocols of recovering of remains in order to ensure a secure chain of custody. In order for the results of any excavations to be recognised as legitimate and contribute towards legal justice in some future, the documentation and removal of human remains needs to be carried out by certain qualified actors in line with international procedures. Relatives are meant to be patient and wait for the proper process to happen. Those who carry out these searches and excavations are aware of the risks of damaging evidence, but believe they will do a more careful and reliable job than the state (El 77 2016; Hidalgo 2016a; Schwartz-Marin and Cruz-Santiago 2016a). Silvia Elida Ortiz Solís from the association Grupo VIDA in Coahuila (2016, p.181) explains, "The biggest risk is to make an error that hinders identification". But still, to do it themselves is the best option that they have.

The general presumption with an excavation undertaken by professional and independent forensic anthropologists is that this work will lead to some sort of justice and some sort of healing for their relatives. Franco Mora (2016, p.178) describes how, through the excavation of human remains,

> the first steps are taken towards a complete reparation; the restitution of the identity of the disappeared person, and their re-digification as a human being to be buried in an appropriate manner, allowing the end to a cycle of pain for their loved ones which was left open for the duration of their disappearance.

The restitution of the body is culturally important, to bring home and bury loved ones properly. Relatives from the Brigada also expressed their hope that the remains they uncovered could be indentified and "returned to their families in a dignified manner" (Brigada Nacional de Búsqueda 2016). This brings us back to the idea of the catastrophe of identity that disappearance creates (Gatti 2014), and how this catastrophe can be overcome by, if not finding the person alive, the act of identifying remains: unidentified material remains and identities without bodies can be brought back together. The suggestion is that these professionals (and not the relatives) have the capacity to fix this catastrophe, to mend the hole. But simply finding remains in Mexico does not necessarily lead to identification or justice. In Mexico, as we have

seen, legal repercussions from forensic work are simply not possible so expert forensic work is solely humanitarian (Moon 2016).

But the materiality of human remains nonetheless forces us to question several things and disrupts several assumptions. On her work on the excavation of mass graves in Bosnia, Sarah Wagner (2008, p.6, emphasis in original) argues that scattered, disassociated, partial remains pose difficult questions: "What exactly does the term *missing* mean in this situation? Does it intimate death? Does it erase hope for the surviving families? Does it affect – somehow alter – the identity of the person now considered to be missing?" Disappearances, deaths, and violence are undeniable when we see bodies, when we have material remains (Weizman 2011, p.104; Robledo Silvestre 2014, p.17), and this is used tactically by relatives to force the implementation of search and investigation mechanisms, and in order to maintain pressure for justice. But something is still left unresolved. If structural barriers are overcome, and if the remains are not too damaged, in theory these corpses and remains can be identified: the restitution of bodies and names, identity returned, they are no longer disappeared. But somehow this is not satisfactory; somehow this is not the end of their disappearance (Gatti 2014, p.30). Because as well as the search being a process with judicial and legal repercussions and goals, the search is also a struggle to restore personhood to the disappeared, that sense of who they are and what is missed. And this leap is hard to make, when the body has been obliterated, and when their identity has been changed: "From the smallest of remains we must imagine what was once a body" (Diéguez 2018, no page).

At their press conference the Brigada was asked what exactly they found. One woman replied:

> The first thing we found was a part of a kneecap, the first bones we had. A kneecap, some ribs, and little bits of bones from every part of the body. The next day we found a foot. We found it with a femur, we found a kneecap, lots of ribs, zips from trousers, lots of burnt clothes. And more than anything we can't put it into numbers, the truth is it is so painful what is happening in Veracruz, how they murder so many people. They leave behind only burnt bones. So many, very very burnt.

Another man added:

> In Veracruz, they are cremating relatives. It is difficult to know how many people they killed here. It's horrible, how many people are turned into how many little piles of bones....God willing, God willing they will identify these people soon, or God willing they won't ever. They have done horrible things with these relatives. And it is painful to think how many people are consumed in a little pile of bones. Maybe it's best if these people are going to be disappeared for their whole lives (Brigada Nacional de Búsqueda 2016).

These remains are not just evidence of crimes. These are the parts of a person. This is someone's foot, someone's rib, someone's kneecap. And the pain for those who found them is in seeing what happened to that person who was surely loved, who is surely missed. How they were transformed from the person, in all their personhood, to these material remains, to parts and elements. And how these material remains will never be the person once again.

Witnessing the destruction of someone's personhood and their physical body, and facing the impossibility to restore these things fully, can change our assumptions about the world: about identity, the idea that we are bounded individual beings, about relationality. Anne Huffschmid (2005, p.211) explains that a bag of bones in Mexico "Is not a solution, in fact it does not provide in itself neither truth nor relief nor justice. But it will always be a fragment, however tiny, that evokes a whole". The sense of betrayal that the systems of search and investigation in Mexico create also changes our perspective. And these experiences – of betrayal by the state through disappearance itself, the violent rupture of identities from bodies, the failure of the state to fulfill basic elements of the social contract, then the inability of so-called experts to restore and rebuild and repair so that life can go on as before – are processes that reveal that the world we live in is in many ways a veneer. Through disappearance and the experience of the search we see cracks in the constructions of liberal modernity and its promises of freedom and equality. And it is in this space we need to think about the searches of the relatives of the disappeared who, facing this, transform themselves and take on these mammoth tasks of investigation, and rebuild worlds that are not about restoration of that which was shattered but are about justice and community.

Conclusions

The searches undertaken by relatives of the disappeared, from the initial hours, days, and weeks, to the organised excavations of human remains, demonstrate the transformation of people that takes place. The evasion of responsibility by the authorities responsible for undertaking investigations into the whereabouts of the disappeared person and the perpetrators of the crime, through omissions, corruption, and legal loopholes, forces relatives to undertake these searches themselves. They visit hospitals, morgues, and police stations; they gather phone records and CCTV footage; they map and undertake network analysis; and all the while they engage in the formal process with authorities to try to advance their case. The recent searches for clandestine graves and human remains are a logical extension to this, as relatives now teach themselves forensic anthropology and archaeology. Revealing human remains is a tactical move to expose the failures of the state, the scale of the crime, and to trigger action. But it is also an act that attempts to restore personhood to that body without identity.

These actions contest the states' authority and monopoly on excavations and forensics, on life and death, challenging the division of expert and victim. The hostility this transformation and transgression of roles and boundaries provokes reveals something about the supposed locations of knowledge and power, and the policing of these borders. Although excavations of human remains in Mexico does not necessarily lead to any sort of legal justice, Letty said, "our searching all builds towards justice in the end" (Hidalgo 2016a). This is a process, and a conception of justice that absolutely includes, but is not limited to, the judicial. Relatives are demanding the return of the disappeared alive, at the same time as searching for human remains. They are demanding the state search and provide justice, while taking these things into their own hands. They are able to hold these contradictory thoughts, are able to undertake actions that allow for the possibility of both. In the search relatives find each other and together they are stronger, they create networks along the common paths they travel in these journeys, and they become knowledgeable. Together, relatives are following traces, the traces of the person who disappeared and the traces of each other, material traces that provide evidence as to the whereabouts of the disappeared

and the crime, and the material traces of the research and work of those that have gone before them, recording, evidencing, testifying, archiving, so that their stories can be told.

The search for the disappeared is *the* priority for relatives, and engagements in a public politics of memory is not separate to the search, but part of it, resisting the placing of the disappeared in the dead past and their criminalisation. But the search itself can also been seen in relation to memory. The disappearance of someone is an act that tries to erase them, so to search for them is a form of remembering. The search is a process of reconsidering that person, reconstructing where they have been. Demanding the rights of the disappeared person to justice is claiming them as a grievable person and a person who still has identity, despite the catastrophe of identity that took place when the body was taken. To find human remains, in the absence of the person alive, seems to reconstruct personhood and identity, yet somehow falls short. Relatives need the identification of remains of course, but the multiple failures and betrayals experienced in that journey cannot simply be healed and moved on from. And in the fact that identity and personhood is not fully restored and life cannot be rebuilt, some cracks, some veneer, the charade of liberal modernity is revealed. This is not, however, a process simply of destitution. Relatives who have gone through these processes can now see and understand the world in a different way, and know their capacity to fight and affect change. They can show us a different way of conceptualising the world, and this is what I shall turn to in the following chapter. The search brings together connections that weave throughout this thesis, and now I want to take a step back to think about what these actions and people and things can reveal about the conceptions of our political and social worlds.

Chapter 9: Life in the world of disappearance

[Disappearance] forces us to reconsider almost everything, and to do it seriously: the relationships between memory and community, between life and death, between individual and environment, between identity and language, between representation and facts

Gabriel Gatti (2014, p.117)

When I speak to people about disappearance in Mexico, I am often asked *why* it is happening. I always try to engage fully in this question, to explain the complexity of the situation; how it is not the same as the military dictatorships of the Southern Cone of Latin America in the 1970s, nor it is simply drug related, and how fundamentally, aside from being in the wrong place at the wrong time, disappearance is happening because it can happen: because of structural and historical impunity. This answer tends to be inadequate for the person asking; there is a desire for a simple explanation that I cannot provide. The *why* that then follows changes and becomes a question of true incomprehension; it cannot be possible that disappearance is happening on such a scale to any person across Mexico. As described in the quote above, disappearance disrupts the orders and categories of the modern world. Disappearance forces us to question things which we believed were strong and stable, inherent, even, to modern life. The ambiguous loss of disappearance "causes even the strongest of people to question their view of the world as a fair, safe, and understandable place" (Boss 2002, ps.39). As we saw in Chapters 5, 7, and 8, to acknowledge and accept that disappearance is happening indiscriminately and that the institutions of justice do not protect or listen is a world-shattering experience, but it is one that seems to transform people.

The previous six chapters in this thesis have followed traces of memory and disappearance and led me to actions and spaces that challenge the dominant academic and practitioner idea and use of memory in a (post) conflict context. Furthermore, throughout these spaces and activities is a frustration, which in many ways motivates the responses we saw, with an inability to translate the experiences of fear, injustice, absence, and ambiguous loss people are living. Relatives of the disappeared and other

victims of violence in Mexico again and again face a public that either does not want to understand, or simply cannot. The reality of the lives that relatives of the disappeared are testifying to pushes our frameworks of intelligibility to their limits. A void emerges, or was already there; an inability to imagine what life is like for others that at times feels like an inability to even see or hear those afflicted by violence. And this barrier is a part of the experience of being the relative, victim, or survivor of violence that involves the state either as the direct perpetrator or through a lack of due process to the victims. It has implications for these people, in how and where they then fit in a society that struggles to acknowledge them or accommodate the different vision of the world they hold.

One evening in April 2016, I went to see a friend in an adaptation of Antigone at the Teatro Juan Ruiz Alarcón, a theatre of 250 seats in the campus of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM, National Autonomous University of Mexico) (Antígona 2016). This production, written and directed by David Gaitán, used the classic story of Antigone and her fight with the king of Thebes to bury her brother, to reflect on contemporary Mexico. It brought the audience into a debate on the role of justice and law in society, the space for civic disobedience and its punishment, how to negotiate power and oppression in the structures through which we are governed, what citizenship means, and the relationship between kinship and the state. It seems there was an appetite for this play and these questions. The production first ran in 2015, followed by runs in 2016 and 2017, as well as tours in Argentina, Uruguay, and Germany. To date they have performed it on 116 occasions (Zavala 2018). The questions this production of Antigone posed in this moment in this place have remained with me and relate to what I want to explore in this chapter. The play probed the deeper questions that can arise and be revealed through people and lives that disrupt the stable categories we construct in liberal modernity.

What I suggest in this chapter is that disappearance reveals something to us about the structures, institutions, and ideas of liberal modernity. The actions and interventions that have been explored in this thesis not only challenge certain structures of modernity and liberalism that frame the Mexican state and society, but reveal their fragility and particularity. I demonstrate this by drawing on the examples already explored in the thesis and by elaborating several moments or encounters when I saw

these dynamics at play. In moments of (attempted) transgression of the boundaries and structures of liberal modernity that were obscured under the guise of universal freedom and rights, their existence is perceptible. We realise that limits were there all along, policing our behaviour and shaping the possibilities of our lives. Through this revelation something in one's worldview shatters; the veneer of liberal modernity cannot go up again, but different forms of relationality are then visible.

I suggest that the experience of revealing these structures — of being betrayed by the systems which are meant to give us freedoms, rights, and protection — is so disruptive to the modern social order that those whose live this experience are excluded and isolated from society. This is a social and spatial isolation; the disappeared and their relatives are not listened to, not understood; they are the awkward reminder that perhaps everything is not as it seems. The revelation of these things, for those who are living this nightmare, can feel like transportation to a different realm or world. The world of liberal modernity continues, in fact exists within the same geographical territory as the world relatives and others find themselves in, but remains largely untouched by the world of disappearance.

In this chapter, then, I first explain which structures and ideas of liberal modernity are revealed as fragile through disappearance, and how these potential cracks in the veneer of the modern social order are policed by the state and society. Secondly, I explore the metaphor of two worlds: the world of the modern social order and the world of disappearance. Relatives of the disappeared and others become inhabitants of a world that exists in the same space as the modern social order, but their lives do not touch it. As well as revealing the veneer of the modern social order, disappearance also reveals the limit of language and interpretive frameworks, which further isolates those realities. But within the world of disappearance people are constructing communities and other forms through which to express and communicate. Lastly, I look at how the actions and objects and people explored throughout the thesis transgress the boundaries of these social worlds and translate between them. I suggest framing these memorials, actions, people, and places as boundary objects (Star and Griesemer 1989) that bridge and can be seen in both worlds; they are the traces of the world of disappearance in the modern social order. They assert that the disappeared and those close to them matter, and that their lives and their world exist. The

transformations we have seen throughout the thesis are descriptions of the process of revealing, seeing, understanding, and then acting from this other realm.

Revealing the veneer

> *In Mexico we are all potential victims — murderable, disappearable, extortionable, exileable*
>
> Alejandro Vélez (2016b, p.13)

Disappearance is inherently an encounter with the state. Whether the direct perpetrator of the crime, or whether the encounter takes place in the aftermath of disappearance, as relatives attempt to work with the criminal and judicial systems to search and investigate, in the encounter something is revealed. Avery Gordon (2008, p.126) explains, "encountering the disappeared or confronting disappearance means colliding with and touching the bewitching spell of the state". The Mexican state is a particular state, a state whose institutions are founded in and have a veneer of liberal modernity, but whose practice is authoritarian and totalitarian. As we saw in Chapter 1, under the guise of the universal and inalienable rights of liberty, legal equality, and security, under the veneer of liberal institutions and the constitution, modernity and liberalism are also violent (Latham 1997; Aguilar Rivera 2012, p.xiv; Franco 2013). Disappearance, and the actions of relatives and those that accompany them in its wake, reveals the precariousness of liberal modernity and its veneer, and in fact shows several assumptions upon which it is premised to be dubious. Namely, these are the social contract between a state and its citizens, the concept of the rights-bearing individual on which it is based, a world constructed on dualisms such as life and death and absence and presence, and the concept of linear time which underpins these. Throughout the thesis we have seen that any thing, person, or action that cracks the veneer and reveals the fragility of the modern social order is policed by state and society, in order to continue the myth of liberal modernity in Mexico.

Disappearance is one example or way of being in the world in which we can see the supposedly universal traits of liberal modernity as particular structures that produce violence. Modernity and liberalism are sets of ideas that are projected as universal,

but they emerged from the particular social context of European enlightenment (Taylor 2012). Liberal modernity works to present the idea that there is only one way of being in and knowing the world (Taylor 2012). However, in Mexico and beyond there are other communities and examples that challenge and reveal its veneer. Specifically, indigenous communities, women, the working classes and *campesinos*, and political movements such as the Zapatistas (Rabasa 2010) expose and critique modernity. Furthermore, Lucy Taylor (2012) and others argue that colonial relationships continue to condition social relations in Latin America. She states (2012, p.389): "scholars like Quijano write from places where not only is racialised injustice, exclusion and disdain an obvious fact of life, but where indigenous cosmologies and practices are vivid, visible and everyday". These and other groups have always been marginal and marginalised in liberal modernity; these groups know that the inalienable rights of liberalism are in fact not inalienable at all (Rodríguez 2009). Under its veneer of freedom and equality, liberal modernity is founded on exclusion and discrimination.

On first glance, disappearance seems to be an anomaly of liberal modernity, something going wrong within the system. Yet in the context of the last military dictatorship in Argentina, Gabriel Gatti (2014, p.16, 26) argues that disappearance was not exceptional to the modern project, but quite the opposite. The practice of disappearance in Argentina in the 1970s was exacerbated modernity: part of a civilizing project to re-found the nation, to strive for an orderly world. States that profess to be liberal and modern can in fact apply these values with discretion; in practice rights are not universal but belong only to some, and can be taken away. Through disappearance in contemporary Mexico we see a social order characterised by violence and a lack of rule of law (Schwartz-Marin and Cruz-Santiago 2016a, p.484), under a veneer of liberalism. Jean Franco (2013, p.216) describes this as a pretence of normality that obscures everyday violence: "The authorities are real. The police enforce laws. The courts function. There is a consensus here to believe the unbelievable, to insist that things are normal — the government is in charge" (Charles Bowden, cited in Franco 2013, p.216).

Liberal modern states are founded on a social contract: a tacit agreement between a state and its citizens that individuals submit to the authority of the state in exchange

for the protection of their rights (Lessnoff 1990; Morris 1999; Rodríguez 2009). In the modern social order it is as individuals that we hold these rights, participate in politics, and argue for protection before the law (Butler 2006, p.24; Rodríguez 2009, p.10). Yet in disappearance, the state, through either perpetrating the crime or denying due process, betrays those universal and inalienable rights, betrays the social contract. Furthermore, the idea of a neatly bounded and stable individual is itself thrown into question by disappearance. The tearing of a body from its identity is experienced as a catastrophe because it breaks this union we believed to be stable, the modern idea that our identities are inherent (Gatti 2014, p.33). The discovery of human remains and efforts to restitute identities, explored in Chapter 8, showed us that these betrayals and catastrophes cannot be fully repaired, that the cracks in the assumptions of liberal modernity cannot be smoothed over once revealed. And, as we saw in Chapter 6, disappearance has revealed to relatives and others that their own identities were also vulnerable, and are in fact constituted relationally with people around them. Disappearance, then, breaks the social contract, reveals it to have been a guise, and presents a challenge to the concept of the individuals on which our rights are held and claimed.

Modernity structures and understands the world through neatly bounded dualisms. However, disappearance, Avery Gordon (2008, p.97) explains, is "an exemplary instance in which the boundaries of rational and irrational, fact and fiction, subjectivity and objectivity, person and system, force and effect, conscious and unconscious, knowing and not knowing are constitutionally unstable". Foremost, disappearance complicates the divisions of life and death, and presence and absence. Yet, to be a rights-bearing individual relies upon a person being unambiguously present or absent, alive or dead. The ambiguous loss of disappearance and the experience of the presence of absence discussed in Chapter 6, mean that the disappeared exist somewhere between these binary positions. This status of disappeared persons has been problematic when relatives and others attempt to make legal claims on their behalf or in relation to them. Our legal systems, founded in the liberal and modern concept of the individual, have struggled to accommodate the disappeared and their relatives. Assumptions about the linearity of time underpin liberal modernity, and we have seen across the thesis practices that recognise and challenge its politics. The disappeared and their relatives have shown linear time to be

a construction, that there are other ways of conceptualising time. The people seen throughout this thesis have enacted memory practices and counter-narratives that resist moves to place the disappeared in the ontologically inferior dead past in order for society to progress and slot the disappeared into the modern social order. These actions instead fight to keep the disappeared in the present present (Bevernage and Aerts 2009). The always present yet absent, neither alive nor dead nature of the disappeared is in itself confounding to modern linear time, which uses the past as a master metaphor for death (Bevernage and Aerts 2009) and the present time as life.

The disappeared and their relatives, then, in their inability to be incorporated into the modern social order and through their disruption of seemingly stable categories, reveal that order to be a particular construction, rather than universal fact. And this revelation is a profound one, an experience I would describe as ontologically destabilising. It is a process of realising that fundamentally the state will not protect you; that it can abuse, will not respect the rights that you, as an individual, supposedly have. Jenny Edkins (2003a; 2006) has argued that revelations such as these are traumatic or, how she (2006, p.109) frames it, what trauma does "is reveal the way in which the social order is radically incomplete and fragile". She (2006, p.110-111) follows,

> We prefer to think of buildings as solid, of home as a place of safety, of ourselves as separate from our neighbours, and of our bodies as made of living flesh not inorganic atoms. A traumatic event demonstrates how untenable, or how insecure, these distinctions and these assumptions are. It calls for nothing more or less than the recognition of the radical relationality of existence – both living and dead.

This process of revelation and ontological questioning is an isolating one. Those who see the structures of liberal modernity that are revealed through disappearance become awkward; they no longer fit in the social order. Within the structure of modern society Gatti (2018, no page) argues there is space for the marginalised, for example the poor. But there are some whose existence is in fact denied, they are inexistent, expelled from citizenship, and here he locates the disappeared. Zombies, he names them, human lives that have been expelled from the discourse that would

include them in the social realm. The rupture of people who have been disappeared from their social context and meaning, as well as the stigmatisation and expulsion of those who search for them, makes the disappeared and their relatives out of place. Edgar Chávez Hernández (2018, no page) summarises, "to disappear in Mexico also means to disappear as a citizen and as a human being". They are unable to participate in society in the same way because their presence is the evidence of how precarious the infrastructure that we all rely on is.

I sat in the audience during a consultation with relatives on the development of the General Law on Disappearance in the Mexican Senate. Of the many testimonies given that day, one woman's words and actions demonstrated her worldview, having, like all those there that day, lived the experience of realising the promises of liberal modernity were an illusion. Representing Los Otros Desaparecidos in Guerrero, she shouted towards the Senators present:

> We live this day after day. We're here today to meet with you to fix the law. Why do we have to go to the mountains with a spade? Every Sunday a group of people go out. Their technology is a spade and a brave heart. Your protocols don't work!...Everyone's eyes are on the forty-three [Ayotzinapa students who disappeared from the same town she lives in], I'm with 500 families! Open your eyes and look at me! (Public Audience for the General Law on Disappearance 2016).

In these words I see the promises of liberal modernity shattered and exposed. She is isolated from the modern social order, a world that ignores her and the families she works with. And this marginal existence is her life, daily, failed by the social contract. But she has community, she is part of something bigger. Her presence in the room that day was uncomfortable; she was not a passive victim or intimidated by the context, she spoke of her reality. She told those who hold political power in this liberal institution how she sees and knows she is a victim of their structural violence. Although institutional change is recognised as a good thing strategically amongst relatives — that is why they were there that day choosing to participate — the sense I got was one of managed expectations. Spaces such as these are not where gains will be made in their searches, but participation in them is part of the long-term struggle. However, for the state, consultation is a process through which it can depoliticise what the relatives have to say; the state is able to show they are democratic, that they

gave space for civic engagement. This woman did not allow that to happen. She knew the power she had in that forum and did not appease the institution, she did not behave like a female victim, she did not allow the veneer of the liberalism to obscure her view and close over the cracks she exposed.

There is a power in revealing the precarity of liberalism, and actions and people that do this are policed by the state and society. The state attempts to control narratives around disappearance and uphold the illusion of the modern social order and social contract. We saw this in Chapter 3, in the construction of the Memorial a las Víctimas and how the denial of Mexico's dirty war is obscuring the continuity of forced disappearance. We saw it in the criminalisation and dehumanisation of victims in Chapter 5. And in the obstructions of criminal investigations and due process in Chapter 8. The victims and their relatives are also policed in their victimhood. Frustration, rage, and anger are not welcome, seen, or heard by the systems and structures in which the relatives encounter the state: supposedly liberal institutions founded on rationality, a key idea of modernity. This is a politics of emotion, where the grieving victim should be the recipient of help, rather than an agent in their own right (Edkins 2003a, p.9). Relatives are supposed to respectfully, calmly, articulate themselves while being grateful. Not transgress the boundary of victim and expert. Not search, not excavate, not yell in the Senate.

International and non-state organisations are also part of, and can serve to maintain, the modern social order. When experts and institutions move in to manage the aftermath of state violence under the guise of transitional justice or reconciliation, relatives are asked to put their anger and possibly legal justice to the side as they are preventing a more important societal need to move on. While I recognise these actions have honourable intentions, they serve a political project to maintain the status quo of liberal modernity. These are processes that attempt to close over the cracks that were revealed in the illusion of liberalism, to continue progressing onwards. We are asked to ignore that other world, that was temporarily visible. Edkins explores this in what she calls trauma time: after a traumatic event the state moves quickly to close down any possible cracks in the system, any openings through which a different framing of the world can be understood (2006, p.107). Judith Butler (2006, p.29-30) also recognises this: "When grieving is something to be feared, our fears can give rise

to the impulse to resolve it quickly,...to restore the loss or return the world to a former order, or to reinvigorate a fantasy that the world formerly was orderly".

Underlying these mechanisms and moves to smooth over and hide these openings is an attempt to declare that injustice and human rights violations — the breaking of the social contract — are in the past. This can manifest as a focus on historical injustice at the expense of contemporary injustice; to say the past was evil, but evil is past (Bevernage 2015), and is of course one way in which memory and memorialisation is used as a project, explored in Chapter 3. The rush to memory after an event (Edkins 2003b) is part of the processes that seek to remedy a trauma quickly, for a political desire to heal it and move on, to maintain a linear narrative of origins (Edkins 2006, p.107). Monuments, museums, and memorials are used to represent some sort of public acknowledgement or apology for atrocity, underpinned by the assumption that remembrance leads to prevention in the future, that it heals, and that it is reparative — a form of justice. Even though in Mexico disappearance is not a problem situated in an evil past but is ongoing, projects to restore the status quo are underway, and the actions of relatives that transgress their position as victim are discredited or dismissed, as we saw in the response of professional forensic anthropologists to the relatives' excavations in Chapter 8.

Gatti (2014, p.55) explains how on the other hand some actors, rather than simply ignoring the cracks and smoothing them over, try to fill the void of disappearance with meaning. In Mexico, there is an infrastructure of organisations and commissions — state, non-governmental, and international non-governmental — that exist to support victims and guide them through problems they are facing, but which fundamentally do not question their position in the architecture that excludes the disappeared and their relatives from the modern social order, and which then work to smooth over the crack and maintain the status quo. Archivists, forensic anthropologists, and those working in the field of human rights, attempt to reconstruct the identities of the disappeared and re-signify that which lost its meaning in the modern social order. Without contesting the need to demand truth, justice, and memory, nor that there is value in recovering dignity and identity, Gatti (2014, p.35) points out one consequence. In restoring identities and meaning to the disappeared and attempting to reincorporate them into the social order, they are meant to become

full citizens or whole subjects once again — fully present — who never suffered the catastrophe of disappearance. Disappearance has the potential to change our conceptions of identity, but these projects seek to give meaning to the void without recognising that those people are now inhabitants of the void, that they and their identities have irreconcilably changed, and that they can expose a different way of knowing the world (Gatti 2014, p.92).

Processes of excluding the disappeared and their relatives from the modern social order are also maintained and internalised by us all in society. Writing on enforced disappearance in Argentina, Gordon (2008, p.94) describes "the quiet, unmotivated complicity of those who shut their eyes, go about their daily routines, and find every means available to not know, to shelter themselves from what is happening all around them". The dehumanisation of the disappeared and others affected by violence in Mexico allows us to continue with daily life without seeing the other world, without acknowledging our connections to it and those living there. There is no space for such disturbing and disruptive people in our world, they are instead placed into categories that reinforce the world of liberal modernity: they are 'bad people', 'sad victims', or 'in the past'. In Mexico and in the UK, when I talk about disappearance I frequently encounter an active desire in people to block out the violent reality that some are living, to not listen to what I am saying. You can cause such ontological discomfort that you lose the ability to communicate with that person; a wall between worlds has gone up. That person falls back to explanations that simplify, that criminalise and dehumanise, that fail to recognise what is in front of them and their complicity, for self-assurance: violence does not happen without reason, therefore it will not happen to people like me.

In September 2016, I arranged for Leticia Hidalgo from Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Nuevo León (FUNDENL, United Forces for Our Disappeared in Nuevo León) to meet with an international human rights charity at their UK headquarters in London (Hidalgo 2016b). In a meeting room in the basement of their building, Letty shared the story of what happened to Roy and what she has been doing to search for him (seen in Chapter 8) in meticulous detail, including every structural and institutional barrier she had faced, to the small group of staff who had agreed to meet us. Their lack of response hung in the room. There was no meaningful follow up

to her story, there was nothing these people, or this organisation, could do to help her. They thanked her for sharing and told us they are working on a project to support and protect human rights defenders like Letty at a global level. Letty's story, the insecurity she lives daily, and her need for basic systems of search, accountability, and justice, rendered the idea of supporting people like her at a global level absurd. Sat around this table, I watched the illusion that this organisation in all its capacity could do something to help, fall apart. Letty, however, is used to this kind of frustrating meeting, small promises, and incapacity. She knows the state and other institutions betray the social contract. But I had the impression that the realisation was too uncomfortable for the staff; Letty lives in a different world to them, and she entered their space, evidencing it, and shattered their world. She revealed to them, for that brief meeting, the illusion of the modern social order and that it can betray.

Disappearance can reveal the precariousness of liberal modernity and its social order, by disrupting many of its foundational ideas as particular and untenable, rather than universal. The disappeared, their relatives, and other people and things and actions that communicate and evidence this are policed. They are discredited and dismissed, excluded and controlled, in order to sustain the illusion of the liberal modern project and keep progressing along linear time. We find, however, that smoothing over or filling this void is not possible. There is no reinsertion of the disappeared back into the social order as it was; "meaning falls apart and that falling apart remains, immovable. That is where the truly structuring aspect of forced disappearance of persons operates" (Gatti 2014, p.29). And this is why the disappeared and those affected by disappearance are uncomfortable; they are too disruptive to the modern social order. They show us that they do not live in the world we inhabit, that their catastrophe cannot be repaired. It is a pain and a wound that is too transformative, that reveals too much, for the order to be restored.

Life in the other world

Enforced disappearance is by nature the contradiction of life and death.
It is a transfer to another world
Andrés Marcelo Díaz Fernández (2016, p.135)

Having the veneer of modernity and liberalism pulled back and its particular rather than universal nature revealed, experiencing the shattering of the belief in a stable world and the social contract, is spatially and socially isolating. It is as if those affected by disappearance, violence, and injustice live in a realm which maps onto the same geography of the world the rest of us live in, of the modern social order, but their world and them within it cannot be seen, cannot be touched. This is the void that I saw in the meeting with Letty in the offices of the human rights organisation, and in the Mexican Senate during hours of testimony from relatives of the disappeared. I watched as the handful of Senators present became more and more tired by and distanced from what they were hearing, and the relatives more and more frustrated and angry. The different lived realities of those who have seen the structures of our world and those who police them became so stark it was as if any possible connection or comprehension between them crumbled and collapsed in front of my eyes. A mismatch of expectation and understanding opens a gulf between them, and the two separate worlds these people live in are re-enforced.

I want to take some time to explain how I came to this metaphor. I have listened to and read numerous comments from relatives of the disappeared and others who have experienced injustice in Mexico, who have described their isolation in these spatial terms. I have also come across comparable examples of people whose lives and worlds have been shattered, and how their existence then feels. The disappeared and their relatives have in many ways been expelled from society; they reside in a liminal space, unable to be socially defined (Gatti 2014; Robledo Silvestre 2014, p.7). Through mechanisms we have seen throughout the thesis of criminalisation, the narco-machine, systematic failures of criminal investigation and due process, and a politics of time, tens of thousands of people are disappearing without being noticed by society in general. Many people go about daily life unaffected and untouched by the violence that shapes the lives of others. Many have the privilege to live amongst violence and structural injustice and not feel it, not notice it, and not be aware of how it shapes their lives. Within the same geographical space, the trajectories and pathways of people's lives overlap but do not touch, they slide over and occasionally butt up against one another, but lives are lived in separate dimensions.

In her book *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self*, Susan Brison discusses her rape and attempted murder, and how she experienced life in its wake. She explains (2002, p.15), "Unlike survivors of wars or earthquakes, who inhabit a common shattered world, rape victims face the cataclysmic destruction of their world alone, surrounded by people who find it hard to understand what's so distressing". The boundaries of Brison's world and self that she believed to be stable were no longer, the ways she connected to the world was severed: "The line between life and death, once so clear and sustaining, now seemed carelessly drawn and easily erased" (2002, p.9). I suggest the isolating, stigmatising, and fearful experience of disappearance is comparable. Gatti found another example where people described this world shattering and spatially isolating experience: those who survive disappearance. In Argentina and Uruguay, many people who had been inside the machine of state terrorism came out of it, after months or years. He (2014, p.120) describes, "One world is on — the world of rules. The other is off — the world of broken rules. They run in parallel, with barely any doors between them. They are not communicated. They coexist, but they have different logics". The spatial distance felt by relatives of the disappeared in Mexico was encapsulated in a comment from one relative who had just returned from the first Brigada Nacional de Búsqueda (National Search Brigade), described in Chapter 8. During the press conference he said: "We are living a different life to you, to whom nothing has happened. When it does [happen to you] you will know the failed government we are living with" (Brigada Nacional de Búsqueda 2016). We are living in the world of rules, and if or when we experience disappearance or other injustice we will know the world in a different way. We will see the illusion of modern social order, and we may see the world that relatives of the disappeared have inhabited for years. We may even inhabit it ourselves.

This change in perception and lived experience is not only spatial but it is also temporal. The linear time of modernity — of past, present, and future — is just one way of conceptualising time. Historian Berber Bevernage (2015, p.351) explored how victims and survivors of violence can hold alternative visions of historical time: "they often...combine their retrospective gaze with present- and future-focused projects of justice (for example, redistributive justice) and...therefore resist dualist visions of temporality and even notions of temporal distance". Avery Gordon has made similar observations. Her conception of haunting, describing obscured social forces that

shape life, also challenges the separation of past, present, and future. Ghosts, people and things that reveal the structures of the modern world, are part of a transformative process of recognition that "refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look" (Gordon 2008, p.22). The disappeared, their relatives, and those who are affected by it, exist in a parallel world spatially, but which also can hold differing conceptions of time and memory. In many ways, the memoryscapes described in Chapter 4, are descriptions of this other world, or are pushing towards it.

While undertaking this research I lived in a centrally located middle class neighbourhood of Mexico City, and frequently came across fashion photo shoots and film sets for adverts and *telenovelas* in the street. Although this neighbourhood suffers from issues that hide just beneath the surface, such as extortion of the cafés and bars, it is a place of wealth, privilege, and general distance from the violence affecting the country. Encountering these film sets in the street was more than just brash; it was jolting. It exemplified the distraction and spectacle that the majority of the country is looking towards rather than the pain and violence and betrayal that others are experiencing. One afternoon, a large crowd of people stood in the street outside the building where I took Spanish classes. I presumed the crowd was outside the offices of one of the leading independent human rights organisations in Mexico, next door. To enter my building, I approached a man in a suit stood in front of the gate and asked if I could pass. He looked confused, someone else asked me to step back, and a moment later the man in the suit had pulled a pistol out his jacket and was enacting a fight scene.

I watched this scene in surprise, as guns waved and a fight unfolded in the afternoon sunshine, filmed for others' entertainment. And as I looked about I saw a group of *campesinos* also watching, this time from the entrance of the human rights organisation that represents relatives of the Ayotzinapa students, victims of state violence in Atenco, and environmental defenders from Guerrero, among many others. It is not unlikely that those people were living state and structural violence as their daily norm. And here they watched the creation of the spectacle, complete with violence, which obscures their lives and worlds. *Telenovela* and unjust nightmare, wealth and poverty, taking place in the same geography but not touching; no friction,

until little moments of clash take place where the illusion falls apart, the system is exposed, and it shocks. This is what happens when extreme cases make the news — Ayotzinapa, San Fernando, El Pozolero, News Divine, Casino Royale, Tetelcingo, Narvarte — in these moments the other world is too present to hide it and the general public is disturbed. But this is a temporary emotion, a brief look at the other world that came a bit too close to home. It is an irruption, a disruption, but life will go back to normal.

Another problem to these isolating practices is that in disappearance and violence in general we find some limits to our language to talk about such acts and lives. We saw in Chapter 5 the creation of a new lexicon in Mexico, *narcoñol* (Reguilo 2011), which distances the public from the violence and victims, and criminalises them in turn. The disappeared are constructed as ungreivable and therefore worthy of their expulsion from the social sphere; their relatives are tainted by association. And we saw problems in legal language in Chapter 8, for example the definition of enforced disappearance that creates a hierarchy of victims between those who can prove excessive state violence and those who cannot. Gatti theorises that disappearance is a catastrophe of identity *and* language, that disappearance also reveals the limits of words. In a recent audience with president-elect Andrés Manuel López Obrador, one relative stated: "We are living a pain that doesn't have a name. And I am going to tell you why: if my mother dies I am an orphan, if my husband dies I am a widow... But what words are there for someone with a disappeared child?" (Rea et al. 2018, no page). This is where language and identity meet; she has no word for her pain, no word for her identity. As we saw in Chapter 6 our identities are relational; this woman has also lost a sense of herself, who she is, in the disappearance of her child, and her experience cannot be acknowledged in a social order that cannot reinsert her within the fold.

Elaine Scarry suggests that resistance to language is in fact essential to what pain is and how it is felt. Pain has no object in the external world; it cannot be objectified to assist in its expression, which draws parallels with the absence or void or ambiguity of disappearance. She (1985, p.4) writes,

> for the person in pain, so incontestably and unnegotiably present is it that "having pain" may come to be thought of as the most vibrant

> example of what it is to "have certainty," while for the other person it is so elusive that "hearing about pain" may exist as the primary model of what it is "to have doubt".

This is how language contributes to the void experienced by those tainted by disappearance. In the context of disappearance in Mexico there are very practical reasons why some things are left unspoken: violence targeting people who speak out and search is common. But the problem of declaring that language has reached its limit when faced with such shattering experiences as disappearance, is that this is then an excuse to not try to speak about these things (Brison 2002; Edkins 2003a; Butler 2006; Gatti 2014). The so-called unspeakable, such as disappearance, is then beyond the bounds of political action, and those who have experienced it are once again let down by society.

It is almost impossible to translate and communicate the other world; its boundaries are policed by the structures of the state and we are trained socially to not recognise what we are looking at, at the limits of our language and interpretive frameworks. But whether we recognise it as an inhabitable place or not, there is life in the other realm. Relatives of the disappeared, others affected by violence, and those who accompany them inhabit it and are constructing new ways to make claims against the state, enact forms of citizenship, find creative solutions to entrenched problems, and build a language that is flexible enough to allow for the contradictory nature of the lives they must lead negotiating these worlds, structures, and emotions. From Gatti's perspective, relatives such as himself are not seeking to overcome the catastrophe of disappearance, unlike mechanisms of the state and other institutions that seek to do just that, but that they have found a way to live and construct identity within it. He (2014, p.134-135) explains,

> Nobody doubts that "this" is tinged with pain, with suffering, with doubts, with absences. With a great deal of hurting. Nobody. But in those suffering universes there are other things, and in them living is possible, however good or bad that living may be, and even thinking is possible.

People rebuild from that place, not reconstructing the social order of liberal modernity, but a world that allows for alternative conceptions of time, justice, citizenship, identity, and memory. Speaking from that other realm involves a lexicon

that recognises and allows for contradiction and flexibility, based on their insights into both worlds.

Relatives of the disappeared and others affected by disappearance exist in a social order that does not recognise them, which has no language to describe them, in which they are invisible. But from the world of disappearance people find ways to represent themselves and to claim rights, they build community, and creativity flourishes alongside the pain of disappearance. This is what the activities we have seen across the thesis are a part of. When language fails we can still make; we can stitch, we can print, we can search. Thinking about the social isolation experienced by the disappeared, their relatives, and others affected by such violence through a spatial metaphor helps visiblise the out-of-placeness and problem of communication and connection relatives and other citizens face when trying to convey disappearance and its causes. They inhabit another world, another realm within the same geography as the modern social order. This is what makes moments when people or things expose liberal modernity as a veneer and the existence of the other world so uncomfortable, and why institutions and society work to police them, to smooth them over and move on. So it is within this context and this line of thinking, that we can reassess what the actions and interventions we have explored throughout the thesis are doing; how they are bridging these worlds, transgressing these boundaries, communicating and speaking across the void.

Transgressing the boundary

The world of the modern social order and the world of the disappeared can be mapped onto the same coordinates. Those that live in the world of disappearance inhabit the same streets and plazas as those who remain unaffected, but the void in experiences and lived realities mean that the majority of society can continue their lives without being disrupted by what the lives of others reveals. The other world and those that inhabit it are not seen and the boundaries of the worlds are policed. Overtly and covertly, their reality and the questions it poses for our worldview are obscured. But it is, perhaps, at the boundary, where the objects, people, projects, interventions, and actions that we have seen in the previous six chapters of this thesis work. They bridge

these two worlds, they transgress the boundaries, they open up spaces where understanding is possible, they reveal the other world. This is not a process of filing the void with meaning or setting the linear path of modernity back on track, but simply opening space for these other experiences to be seen, heard, and felt.

The concept of boundary objects, coined by Susan Leigh Star and James R. Griesemer (1989) as objects that inhabit several intersecting social worlds, is useful in thinking this through. Although working in a very different context, they faced the problem of how to reconcile meanings and communication across different social worlds. They (1989, p.393) explain,

> These objects may be abstract or concrete. They have different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognizable, a means of translation. The creation and management of boundary objects is a key process in developing and maintaining coherence across intersecting social worlds .

Drawing on earlier work, Star and Griesemer (1989, p.412) identified that the central task for cooperation between social worlds that share the same space but hold different perspectives, is translation. In this thesis we have seen memorials, traces that haunt a memoryscape, embroidered handkerchiefs, a person's belongings, engraved and printed shoes, and human remains (a connection also made by Moon 2013), as boundary objects that transgress and translate these worlds.

The shoes and footprints of Huellas de la Memoria exemplify this. Since the exhibition in Mexico City, they have travelled to many places across Mexico and Europe. In these exhibitions and encounters a broad audience can see and feel and connect to the world of disappearance, through the texture of the shoes, through the cracks in their soles, through standing alongside the footprints, through intimately connecting to that person and their story. The handkerchiefs in plazas across Mexico also do this, as does the public practice of sitting there and embroidering them. As does the presence of the Plaza de los Desaparecidos, the +43 antimonumento, and the interventions in Cuernavaca. As do the objects, spaces, and rituals that create the presence of absence. It is not just objects, then, that bridge boundaries. Relatives and journalists who fight for space to tell their stories to a broad audience, and the actions

of making, placing, and caring also connect from the world of disappearance to people in the modern social order. This is not, then, simply about expanding our language or finding a new vocabulary with which to speak. It is equally about the non-verbal, using other senses such as touch and sight to communicate the experience of disappearance. If we are at the limit of what can be expressed in words, we can find other ways to communicate and translate.

The boundary objects, people, and actions that transgress these realms are often uncomfortable, when sensed, in the modern social order. They reveal that the boundary is there, foremost, and then they remind us that some of us are absent, that some of us have been disappeared, that the social contract was broken. They are disruptive to a criminalising narrative that says the victims are ungrievable and forgettable. And they reveal the fragility of the modern social order. In this way the things explored in this thesis are different to many memorials that in fact do not aid us in our understanding of other people's lived experience but appease us, that interpret events in a way that can be processed within the parameters of linear time and the social contract. The things that have been explored in this thesis are the traces of the other world that can be seen and felt in the world of liberal modernity, they are the clues that another realm exists. Moreover, this is not a case of simply rescuing these traces, but demonstrating that the world of disappearance is not a place of destitution and destruction, but a place of new relationships and creativity. Our disconnection with traces, or our inability to see them and the lives of others, is connected to the pervasive liberal idea of the individual and the loss of our sense of relationality with one another and the things around us. But these projects work to reveal them: our connections with the people, things, and events of the world around us, past and present, visible and hidden, present and absent. By learning to see this other world we do not destroy the pervasive illusion of liberal modernity, but we see lives lived otherwise, politics imagined differently, and subjects formed relationally.

Mexican journalist Javier Valdez, who was assassinated in 2017, once said in reply to a question about how to do journalism in Mexico: "Don't tell the stories of the dead. Anyone can do that. Instead tell the stories of life. Portray the fear, this is the other death, that nobody talks about; this is the gradual death, and it is the worst" (Jabois 2017). Although this comment could be interpreted as flippant and insensitive

towards those that have been killed and their families, I think what Valdez is pushing us towards returns to the idea of the dead past, which we have seen throughout the thesis. The dead can be eulogised, they can also be politicised, but while we focus on the dead and think of death as the other realm to our life, we miss the world the disappeared, their relatives, and others affected by violence, are living in. These are the uncomfortable people. Dead bodies can be incorporated into the modern project, separated from life, they are past in time and in space, but angry relatives and disappeared bodies, and objects which inhabit both social worlds, cannot.

When I think about the actions and stories explored in this thesis the picture in my mind draws back a few scales. Drawing back, we can try to visualise how the actions and lives and objects of both realms, which we have seen throughout the thesis, co-exist. We can see neighbourhoods, cities, the country, teeming with processes and activities and connections: the modern social order and the world of disappearance, moments of violence and practices of rebuilding, encounters with the state and the intimacy of the home. I see the actions of relatives and embroiderers claiming territory, building spaces of strength and peace where violence and fear had taken control, alongside the territorialising geographies of organised crime and the Mexican military. I see the collective installation of antimonuments in public space. I see families caring for the belongings and bedrooms of those absent, maintaining their presence as a ritual. The momentary gathering of people at meetings and on marches. Searches, taking relatives to spaces they had never been, to dig in soil to find those they love. The six previous chapters have all in some way described processes of transformation — processes of inhabiting or constructing the other world. But the outcomes of these processes do not simply reside there, they transgress their boundaries, they move out and beyond.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I took a step back to see what the examples of actions, memorials, and disappearance itself, examined throughout this thesis, might reveal to us about the structures of our world. This was to think through not what it is about disappearance that makes memory complicated, but what it is about disappearance that is so disruptive, so disturbing, to our sense of stability and our ontology.

This chapter first outlined the structures of liberal modernity that are revealed through disappearance to be a fragile illusion: the social contract between a state and its citizens, the concept of the rights-baring individual on which it is based, a world constructed on dualisms such as life and death and absence and presence, all underpinned by linear time. I then looked at how these cracks or openings revealed by disappearance are policed by the state, by criminalising and dehumanising the victims, by writing narratives of memory, and by attempting to enact processes which heal society and move on, again working with a politics of time by trying to place the disappeared in the past. They are also, however, policed by broader society, who have been trained not to recognise the reality of others lives, and by a host of non-governmental organisations who work to repair violent conflicts but in doing so also reconstruct the modern social order. It is precisely these structures that create the need for relatives to conduct their own searches and excavations, and for others to create the kinds of alternative conversations around memory that we have seen in the +43 antimonumento, the Museo Casa de la Memoria Indómita, and the Plaza de los Desaparecidos in Chapter 3, and in the projects Bordando por la Paz and Huellas de la Memoria in Chapters 5 and 7.

The chapter then explored the metaphor of two worlds; that the experience of seeing the veneer of liberal modernity shatter is so isolating and excluding — socially and spatially — that it is experienced as inhabiting a different space and time, a different world within the same geography. Alongside revealing the precarious infrastructure of the modern social order, disappearance reveals the limits of language and expression, which further isolates those living it. But within the world of disappearance people are building community and thinking creatively. From this viewpoint and perspective, they are working to reconstruct a different world, and to strategically work within the

frames of the modern social order when needed, and this is what the actions and objects and people seen throughout this thesis are part of.

Lastly, the chapter examined how these actions, objects, and people transgress the boundaries of the world of disappearance and liberal modernity. Using the concept of boundary objects, these things can be seen in both worlds, they can translate between them, and they can disrupt the modern social order and the ontologies of those who live within it. The things that have been explored in this thesis are the traces of the other world that can be seen and felt in the world of liberal modernity, they are the clues that another realm exists. They do not bring it down, but provide moments through which we can recognise lives lived otherwise and politics imagined differently.

I am aware that there is nothing unique about the insight that modernity creates people and spaces that are excluded. Under the guise of universality, modernity works through violent and destructive mechanisms to divide and exclude some from the social order. In fact, the metaphor of two worlds is to some extent unhelpful or reductive because I believe there are many worlds, or exclusions, or ontologies which co-exist; the metaphor simply served to describe the totality of the experience of shattering the veneer of liberal modernity and the social exclusion it brings. Disappearance in this context in Mexico is just one way, one problem through which, we can see these violent structures and critique them. Starting from listening to the stories of people living these experiences and responding to them I have drawn back to explore what it tells us more generally about the world, and see that it is in fact connected to and has the same outcomes as many other violences, produced, as they were, by the same structures of colonialism, racism, and other dividing practices of modernity. But there is also something particular about disappearance, and this goes back to the way it is very clearly produced by the state in a tearing of the social contract, but also how it challenges the categories of absence and presence, life and death.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

> *Memories are powerful forces encountered via experiences, emotions, places, and things. Their traces lie everywhere: their sensory cues provoke remembrance; they install pauses and digressions in our normative thought processes; and they transport us, however momentarily, to different times and different places. These motions of memory shape and give life to our positioning as people, communities and nations, and are couched within context-specific identity narratives.*
>
> Danielle Drozdzewski et al. (2016, p.447)

At the end of May 2016 I left Mexico City and attended an academic conference on Latin America in New York. Looking through the conference programme, I observed with some amazement the quantity of panels and papers on 'memory'. Although each assumed a meaning for the term and what 'doing' it might be, the majority focused on the cultural production of monuments, museums, and biographies, in the context of now historical events such as the military dictatorships in the Southern Cone or the Cuban Revolution. I spent the conference wondering, not flippantly but seriously, why we spend so much time focussing on these 'past' events, rather than the violence and human rights violations taking place in our current context. I am aware this is problematic in its construction in many ways. I would be the first to argue that events that are forty or even hundreds of years old are not 'past'. I also do not believe that societies need to move on from the past or anything to that nature. I furthermore do not ascribe importance to contemporary events that inherently de-values past violence and trauma. But I would say there is an urgency to recognise contemporary violence that we live among and see its connections to previous violence; we should not wait until these events are neatly finished and in some 'past' for us to see them as important and somehow coherent enough to be studied.

What we can see in this is the academic contribution to the processes of constructing the isolated world that the disappeared and their relatives reside in. If we continue to approach memory and disappearance within the frames of liberal modernity – of distinct dualisms, linear time, and a reliable social contract – then we miss something very important both in terms of academically understanding memory and

memorialisation, and ethically, if we keep studying the disappearances of past dictatorships without acknowledging that the same practices are taking place on a larger scale as we speak. What we miss are the actions and people who challenge those very frames, who reveal them as particular and dominating.

I began this project knowing it was somehow exploring memorialisation and disappearance in Mexico. I knew disappearance was taking place at an extraordinary rate and that this was an opportunity to try to understand processes of memory, narrative construction, and activism against disappearance in the moment in which they were being formed. From the outset, then, the project was moving away from a narrow view of memory work as about contesting and constructing a past, and any preconceptions about the spaces and voices and temporalities from which this can be articulated. Furthermore, there is something specific about disappearance that has drawn academics and artists to it for decades: its power to complicate and disrupt the modern social order. However, I think it is fair to say that a good proportion of work that examines memory and disappearance is concerned with finding a way of bringing disappearance, and the challenges it poses to our concepts, into the modern social order, using memory work to fix the ruptures that disappearance creates.

Memorialisation is a method through which we are told we can deal with a traumatic past, heal, and move forwards. Furthermore, underlying the impulse to study the past and not question the present, to believe, as Berber Bevernage (2015) said, the past is evil and evil is past, is a desire to prevent the ontological insecurity experienced when we question the modern social order and see its fragility. Working on a past that, although traumatic and violent, is in the past and therefore distant temporally and spatially, avoids this confrontation. Yet the ambiguous loss of disappearance is never in the past, we can never move on from it. Without a body and without knowledge of whether the missing person is alive or dead, none of the structural methods we have for dealing with grief through society or the state are possible. Disappearance is not an anomaly to our conception of linear time, but in fact shows us the impossibility of that notion.

This thesis has not been about disappearance as an event, but about what happens and how memory is lived in the wake of disappearance, when people and society are

living with the presence of absence. What we see in the lives and actions throughout this thesis, is work that in some way speaks to memory, but which consciously negotiate the politics of time inherent in mainstream practices that relegate events to the ontologically inferior past through memorialising, to close down contestation and depoliticise. The people and actions explored in this thesis are not working within any 'never again' or 'dealing with the past' frameworks, but are speaking and building from their spatial and temporal positions, resisting mechanisms which deny their reality. This is a conceptualisation of memory that is not about contesting a past but contesting structural violence and injustice, not about reparation or reconciliation but about memory as lived and alive in daily life, not as a pathway to the future, but understanding that past, present, and future are contemporaneous.

Public memorialisation that is usually recognised as 'memory' may serve pedagogical purposes to raise awareness of disappearance, but other practices are finding a new language through which to process and understand disappearance in Mexico in places beyond monuments and museums. The actions seen throughout this thesis are taking place in plazas, the streets where people lived and are now absent, in their homes, in art collectives that are developing responses as they work, in the spaces of the search, at the sites of clandestine graves. The ideas of presence, absence, and trace thread throughout this thesis and become felt, experienced, or in some way visible, through the objects, actions, and people discussed. Life in the wake of disappearance is framed by the presence of absence, and in that frame these objects, actions, and people have a power to communicate and translate the experiences of realities that do not conform to the modern social order. The trace of the wearer is in the shoe, the trace of the shoe is in the places they have been in the search, the trace of the disappeared is tracked by the relative. Bullet holes and other signs of violence mark neighbourhoods and environments. The drawer full of clothes tells us the body is absent; that there was or should be a body to wear them. An antimonument or mural inserts the disappeared into public space. Those spaces are occupied by people embroidering, re-humanising, and grieving.

Importantly, in this thesis we have seen that it is in the becoming of these things where transformations and translations take place. The processes of making, of slowing down, listening, observing, sensing, and working together is where

communities are constructed and new understandings are found. I have shown that it is the experience of living alongside memorials and the incorporation of them into our landscapes and lives that is key to how memorials are experienced, rather than a focus on them as isolated sites of memory. Memory and space are co-produced by us as we live and go about our lives; memories and our environments are dynamically but deeply connected. These are processes that see memorialisation as an ongoing unfinished practice, not a project that can be completed and then turned away from as society progresses onwards. Furthermore, it is through these processes of making and connecting and comprehending that a sense of the structural nature of the violence of disappearance was found and understood by relatives and others in this thesis. It was in the search that relatives realised they were one of many walking those paths, it was in embroidering and engraving and the presence of absence that people realised they were connected relationally to the disappeared and those searching for them.

I argued that the experience of disappearance is so disruptive to the modern social order it is experienced as a spatial and social exclusion: the world of disappearance. The objects, actions, and people that have been explored in this thesis are traces of the world of disappearance that can be seen and felt in the modern social order. They are the clues that another realm, another way of living and being, exists. It is not simply that these traces transgress the boundaries of these worlds and that we can and should recognise them as such, but they show that the lives of the disappeared, their relatives, and those that accompany them are creating and building in this other realm. This is not to establish another binary, to posit the world of disappearance as oppositional to the modern social order. But to show that the modern social order is a veneer that obscures the injustice, inequality, and violence that it creates. The world of disappearance is parallel, everywhere, and potentially experienced by everyone to varying degrees. It is through the objects, actions, and people in this thesis that the world of disappearance is seen and felt; these things can rupture and crack the façade of liberal modernity, and those who have experienced disappearance can no longer comply with its fiction. Through the activities this thesis explores, our eyes are opened to other worldviews, other lives, other ontologies.

This project became an exploration of the ways that the presence of absence and the ambiguous loss of disappearance shapes and reveals some structures of liberal

modernity and the state. It led to a place where we could learn something broader about responses to political violence, and how people in the modern social order constitute themselves and relate to others. If disappearance reveals to us something about modernity, time, and relationality, then the question I need to turn to is what this insight then leads us to conclude about memory. And this is that we need to use a conceptualisation of memory that allows for a variety of ways of conceptualising time. A concept of memory that is not necessarily underpinned by linear time, but one that reflects the ways memory co-exists in multiple sites and at multiple scales, in multiple bodies and communities. This is a conceptualisation of memory that respects and listens to relatives and others excluded from the modern social order, that is responsive, rather than prescriptive, to other peoples lived experiences. This is a process that acknowledges that the dominant conceptualisation of memory in academia is just one worldview, and in other spaces memory is used and experienced in ways that challenge liberal modernity.

Summary

This thesis explored memory and memorialisation in response to contemporary disappearances in Mexico. This was not about disappearance as an event, but about what happens after a disappearance when people and society are living with absence. It was an attempt to listen to the multiple responses that are unfolding in the wake of disappearance, to see and think about what it is that these shattering experiences are revealing to us about the world we construct and inhabit. I began by discussing the multi-disciplinary theoretical frameworks, literatures, and debates that motivated and challenged this thesis in Chapter 1: *Introduction*, exploring memory and disappearance with a focus on time and space. I took forward a broad conceptualisation of memory in this project, which allowed for analysis to be shaped by the context of disappearance in Mexico now, and to see the actions and actors that are responding to disappearance as part of a lived memory. I then explained the context of disappearance in Mexico, using this as the base from which to analyse contemporary disappearance in Mexico throughout the thesis. I situated it within the country's particular version of liberal modernity and democracy, its obscured dirty

war and historical state violence, the recent war on drugs, and chronic impunity, as well as outlining some of the dynamics of contemporary disappearance.

In this project, the methodological and ethical approach shaped and underpinned the research and the thesis. Chapter 2: *The traces of presence: methodology*, explained the challenges faced and approaches taken in doing this research. This chapter grouped my research around three areas: memory sites and memorials, participation in arts projects, and relatives of the disappeared. Although it explored the methods used – ethnography, autoethnography, walking methods, participation – it argued instead for an approach to methods which fostered collaborative sensibilities and framed research as a continued improvisation that moved between empirical and theoretical practices. It also explored how (in)security framed what was possible in this research, and profoundly shaped my analytical position.

I began the substantive chapters of the thesis by outlining some of the landscape of visible and present memorials to the disappeared in public space, and the politics of memory and time at these sites. Chapter 3: *Memorials to the Disappeared* discussed the Memorial a las Víctimas de la Violencia in Mexico City as the state's response to the war on drugs, and as its attempt to control the politics of memory by placing these unresolved deaths and disappearances into the politically inferior dead past, without naming the victims or the perpetrators. In contrast, the chapter then explored the interventions of Comité 68 at the memorial, the Museo Casa de la Memoria Indómita, the +43 antimonumento in Mexico City, and the Plaza de los Desaparecidos in Monterrey, as memory sites which claim space for the disappeared in society, name and restore identity to them, resist impunity, and fight to keep the disappeared in the politically superior present present: present in space and time.

However, I wanted to move beyond looking at memorials on a site-by-site basis or through a biography of a site lens, to look at the wider environments and landscapes of memory that we live within and the embodied experience of memory. In Chapter 4: *Memoryscapes*, I described two walks that I took through the centre of Mexico City, using my own experiences to demonstrate the complex process of experiencing memory through visible and not visible markers and traces, memories of violence and resistance, through the built environment and through the mind. I then explored

Cuernavaca and Monterrey as "wounded" cities, and what the memoryscape of such cities starts to look and feel like for those who live there. Walking and moving through these cities is a way of knowing and a form of lived memory: the disappeared haunt and memoryscapes of violence and absence layer with other dynamic scapes and flows of social and political life.

At this point the thesis moved to examine one project in detail, away from exploring memorials and markers in public space solely, to starting to think about what participation in memory work itself does. Chapter 5: *Bordando por la Paz y la Memoria* explores an ongoing collective memory project that embroiders handkerchiefs to name the victims of the war on drugs. I explored groups in Mexico City, Puebla, and Monterrey, and demonstrate Bordando por la Paz as a project that works against processes of criminalisation and dehumanisation, to instead construct the victims as grievable and re-sensitise society. In the three cities we saw how embroidering works to a different velocity to that of violence: that remaking and sensitising is a slow process; that through it we can connect to and construct communities; and that it has been used by people as a way to take care of their disappeared relatives in their absence. Across the three examples we saw an increase in the intimacy of embroidering, and how it was developed in each context.

Chapter 6: The *Presence of Absence,* made a move in the thesis to examine more private experiences of memory, and the complex ways that absence is often felt as the presence of absence, for those who were close to that person. I used the word *esperar* – to wait, to hope, to expect – to think through the experience of the ambiguous loss of disappearance, and how relatives' lives are not simply on hold, but how they have transformed and act. In the wake of disappearance, particularly within homes, certain spaces, objects, and rituals, become important nodes through which continuing bonds with the disappeared are maintained. And in disappearance relationality between us is revealed; disappearance exposes how we construct ourselves and our identities, so that when someone disappears something of the relatives' identity and sense of presence can be lost too. This chapter, therefore, began to explore the challenge to clearly defined absence and presence, life and death, and bounded individuals, that disappearance provokes, again touching upon a politics of time where absence is relegated temporally and spatially.

At this point the thesis took another turn, away from a focus on the disappeared and actions to restore their personhood, to refocus on those who are searching for them. Chapter 7: *Huellas de la Memoria* explored a project that engraves and prints the worn-out shoes of relatives of the disappeared with words about their search. I centred on the transformations and understandings that take place in the process of making; a focus on the becoming of things that create and represent memory. This was to see making as a form of thinking and knowing. I then explored two aspects of the social life of the shoes and footprints: translation and connection. The shoes tell the stories of who is missing and who is searching for them through the engraved words, but also in their materiality, containing traces of the places they have been and known. The project has brought relatives and other people together into a collective, but it also visibilises connections between aspects of disappearance in Mexico – the temporalities and spatialities of disappearance – which have revealed it to be a sustained and systematic issue. In Huellas, therefore, the paths that individual relatives were walking have become tracks connecting the spaces and moments of disappearance.

Finally, Chapter 8: *The Search* turned to focus on the actions of relatives of the disappeared to find their loved ones and to investigate the crime, as an act of memory. If disappearance is an attempt to erase someone, then searching for them is an act that seeks to restore them: their personhood, their body, and their rights. This chapter first outlined the state of the search: the institutional, structural, and social barriers to proper investigations that leave relatives little choice but to undertake the search themselves. It then looked at the disappearance of Roy Rivera and his mother's search for him, to demonstrate the ways in which relatives transform in the search, gaining skills, information, and knowledge, finding each other and working collectively. This chapter then explored the recent turn to relatives searching for and excavating clandestine graves. Again, relatives transform and educate themselves to successfully find human remains, challenging the divisions of expert and victim, state and citizen. But the discovery and identification of remains still does not fully restore the world nor the identity of the disappeared.

I ended the thesis by taking a step away from how disappearance complicated memorialisation and what memorialisation of the disappeared does, to explore what disappearance reveals to us about the structures of our world. Chapter 9: *Life in the world of disappearance* first argued that disappearance reveals several structures of liberal modernity to be fragile, and how the cracks in this veneer revealed by disappearance are policed by the state, non-state organisations, and within society. I suggested that realising the modern social order is fragile, and being a person that evidences this, is socially and spatially isolating. Furthermore, disappearance reveals to us limits to language and intelligibility. However, this world of disappearance is a space of creativity, construction, and community, which is making a different world to that of the modern social order. In this frame, the actions, objects, and people seen throughout this thesis transgress the boundaries of these realms and translate the experience of disappearance, and can disrupt the modern social order.

Contributions and limitations of the thesis

This thesis does not sit neatly within one discipline, nor was it was designed as a response to a certain debate. Instead, it makes several contributions to practices, ideas, and debates from across the social sciences, arts, and humanities. Futhermore, this project makes a contribution to methodologial practice. Participation, and autoethnographic reflections on it, gave me the insights and analytical positions that I came to. In doing – walking, talking, sharing, embroidering, engraving, printing, and listening – I gained knowledge of the issue of disappearance, but also of what life is like for the people who initiated these projects, who are living disappearance, and who are constructing memory. Particularly, acknowledging and reflecting on insecurity, writing it into my thoughts and notes, gave me further understanding of the reality of life in this context, but also what responding to it through these projects then meant. I went through a process of transformation and learning myself, I was not a distanced expert.

This methodology has enabled me to see that making, specifically, has a transformative role in memory and struggle. It connects people, it knits communities and mends social fabric, and it enables the processing and understanding of traumatic

and world-shattering experiences. Through making myself, with my own hands, I understood that it was the location of transformations of people, material things, and spaces, and that the site of the value of this memory work was in this process just as much if not more than the thing produced. This methodology has shown the connection between practice and thought. Richard Sennett (2008, p.199) wrote, "Put simply, it is by fixing things that we often get to understand how they work". I am not suggesting I have fixed anything, but that reflexive doing is a process of understanding. This is the idea that in the midst of things – a project, a thesis, violence – it is hard to see all the connections. But get on with making (writing, working) and they will start to come together. This, then, is making as a research strategy, a strategy of memorialising, and as political action.

Exploring disappearance in contemporary Mexico contributes to and challenges parts of the literature on disappearance. Contemporary disappearance in Mexico disrupts the 'Argentine definition' of disappearance that is the benchmark for disappearance globally. In this electoral democracy disappearance is taking place at a higher rate than the Southern Cone dictatorships. Mexico, therefore, forces us to question our assumptions about disappearance itself, and the conditions under which it happens. It also asks us to question why scholars are more comfortable to focus on disappearances with temporal distance, in some 'past', rather than those taking place in the present, and how this may restrict our analysis. I have explored what disappearance reveals about time, space, and liberal modernity. Therefore, this thesis joins the voices of a small body of work that uses disappearance as a way to speak about and understand larger structures of the world.

In this thesis I open and stretch the ways in which memory and memorialisation is framed and practiced. Studying memory generally assumes that the referent act that is in memory or being memorialised is in the past. Yet disappearance in Mexico challenges this, both because it is continuing to take place on a daily basis and because disappearance itself in its ambiguity is never over, is never finished. This is a discussion of memory as ongoing practice, and not to do with the past as such. In this thesis I sought to move beyond the 'normal' sites where memory is discussed and analysed such as museums and monuments. I followed the traces of the disappeared and it led me to spaces and sites of the production of memory – public and private,

visible and invisible – that destabilise the idea of a site of memory. It led me to workshops and plazas, streets and clothes drawers, clandestine graves and antimonuments, where lived memory is being made and narrated. To reiterate the point on methodology, this project has shown that practices of making have a transformative role in memory and struggle. Making itself, and the emotional experience of doing so, is an under-recognised site of memory. Together with the nascent practices and discourses of memory seen througout, this thesis temporally and spatially challenges the ways memory tends to be talked about in academic spaces and in the practitioner deployment of memory work; it is in the present present. This, then, is a critique of the underlying assumption of linear time in memory, and how the politics of time is employed by states and others who use memorialisation as a tool through which to heal human rights abuses or place unresolved injustice in the past. Moreover, I argue that we should pay attention to the way that motifs of time can be used to close down political space.

This thesis, I hope, is contributing to the project of telling the stories of people living the war on drugs, people whose lives are caught up in the violence, and putting personhood back in, re-humanising, decriminalising. This was to reject a narrative of the war on drugs that sensationalised the actions of organised crime and a corrupt state, and place importance on the voices that come out of everyday spaces. This thesis shows the war on drugs to be part of structural and ongoing violence that has been present within the Mexican nation-state since it was founded. It argues that recent violence is deeply bound up with state structures and state actors, and is not simply *narco* violence. Particularly, it demonstrates that the war on drugs and disappearance specifically has continuity since Mexico's dirty war. Fundamentally, this thesis is contributing to a literature that recognises disappearance *is* taking place in Mexico. Until recently this fact was vastly under-acknowledged in Mexico and internationally. Furthermore, this is contributing to an even smaller literature on it in English, rather than Spanish.

There is a broad literature across many disciplines that challenges the universality of modernity, and argues that it is inherently violent. Across politics, post- and de-colonial work, feminist theory and others, this literature interrogates modernity and asks questions about how a person relates to political structures, using experiences

from the underbelly of modernity to show that other ways of being and knowing the world exist. Thesis uses the example of disappearance – as a violent practice that involves the state and the experience of ambiguous loss – to contribute to this literature. Disappearance is an example through which we can see and make connections between a person and political structures, other worldviews, and the particular but universalising constructions of modernity and liberalism. I demonstrate that the realm inhabited by those excluded from modernity, in this case the world of disappearance, is a place of life, creation, and contemporaneity, not death, and not past.

Finally, some literature on disappearance and trauma has addressed an underpinning assumption of linear time, as has some on memory. However, I build on this to demonstrate that there is also a spatial element to this politics. Being present (or absent/past) means being present in space as well as time, and in the thesis we see how this spatial element is downplayed in order to depoliticise resistance to disappearance; to push these potentially disruptive and desabilising people away. Furthermore, I set out the argument that place and memory are deeply connected and foregrounded the importance of place when looking at memory. Drawing on critical spatial and geographical theory, I argued that space and memory are co-produced by acts of everyday life, and what this meant specifically in a context of disappearance. Returning to the methodological contribution of this thesis, these ideas were explored by prioritising practices of walking and reflecting on embodied experience; walking as a way of knowing.

In starting this project looking at memory and disappearance I have ended somewhere broader: at the debates and conversations about ontologies, about liberal modernity, and different politics, imaginations, and relational subjects. There are many other examples of lives and experiences that could have brought me to similar conclusions and contributions. Beyond the examples mentioned in Chapter 9 of other worldviews and experiences of exclusion within Mexico, other cases of isolating destruction might prompt the same processes of revealing and rebuilding. Here I am thinking of the lives of people experiencing life threatening or chronic illness or accidents, or, as we saw with Susan Brison, rape and sexual violence. But that this thesis, ultimately, can tell us something about the fragility of the construction of a universal liberal

subject does not devalue this project, but adds another string to the bow of these broad arguments for seeing and imagining a different politics and world.

Following from this, then, there are many other literatures that I could have drawn on to help in this analysis. Namely, decolonial and postcolonial literature, geographical literature on the spatialities of inequality and violence, critical post structural theory, specifically Michel Foucault and Georgio Agamben, and other work that seeks to highlight the lived experiences of people on the margins of modernity and who experience often intersectional exclusion. Furthermore, there is a large amount of fiction, non-academic, and creative projects that explore these ideas. This thesis is simply a reflection of the journey I have taken to reach this point. It was an organic process beginning with literatures from fields I was familiar with and interested in, shaped by research in Mexico, following ideas and recommendations, and reaching these conclusions. It was an improvisation between empirics and theory. Other disciplines and areas discuss parallel journeys and experiences that also reveal particular structures of modernity.

Lastly, in this research there were certain mental, physical, and practical limitations, particularly during my time in Mexico. (In)security, personal relationships, access to places and people, time limitations, and others, all shaped what was and was not possible. But in this research, I have done what I felt emotionally and practically capable of at the pace I could. This thesis stands as the beginning of things: of ideas, relationships, and connections that will go beyond this and continue to develop. This thesis was an essential foundation for future work and directions.

Final reflections

I began this thesis with the story of how I came to this project, and how it coincidentally has entwined with the disappearance of the forty-three Ayotzinapa students. At the time of writing, more than four years after they were forcibly disappeared, the students have not been found, and their families and colleagues are still fighting for answers. Recently, the United Nations Human Rights Office released a report which states there are strong grounds to believe that those arrested in relation

to the disappearances were tortured, and that the state investigation into these crimes was inadequate and covered up (OHCHR 2018a). In 2016, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights created a Special Follow-Up Mechanism for the case, to take steps to force the Mexican state to comply with recommendations of the Grupo Interdisciplinario de Expertos Independientes (GIEI, Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts) to determine the state and whereabouts of the forty-three (IACHR 2018). However, to date no one has been sentenced in connection with Ayotzinapa, and the Mexican government has not carried out a meaningful investigation.

When the GIEI released its second and final report on Ayotzinapa in April 2016, they evidenced a potential motivation for the attack that radically differs from the state's "historic truth" (GIEI 2016). Rather than suggesting the students were mistaken for members of the cartel Los Rojos, the rival to Guerreros Unidos, who supposedly killed the students once the police handed them over, the GIEI put forward that it was in fact nothing about the students that provoked the attack, but the bus they were travelling on. The southern state of Guerrero is the centre of heroine production in Mexico, and Iguala is its distribution centre. Mexico is the second largest heroine producer in the world after Afghanistan, and is the main supplier to the United States: an industry worth billions of dollars (Reveles 2015, p.23). In the state's investigations of the case they reported the Ayotzinapa students had commandeered four buses that day in September 2014. However, the students that survived the attack said they had taken five. Piecing together testimonies and evidence, the GIEI suggested the fifth bus was stopped by federal police, was the only bus the students were ordered out of at gunpoint but not shot at, and the only bus that was driven away from the scene (Tuckman 2015). After that the fifth bus disappears from the state's case file (Tuckman 2015). The GIEI and others suggest that the students could have unwittingly taken a bus that day that was packed full of heroin destined for the United States, and corrupt police officers were dispatched by the Guerreros Unidos to recover the bus at any cost (GIEI 2015; Tuckman 2015; Forensic Architecture 2018; GIEI 2016).

To me this theory makes more sense. The motivation for the attack adds up theoretically, but brutally it also adds up financially. What is numbing in this version

of events, is that we can see that there is a price behind this extreme attack which killed six people, disappeared forty-three, and left more than forty seriously injured. For Ayotzinapa, tens of thousands of people took to the streets in protest in Mexico and internationally. This case of disappearance triggered attention and outrage that no other case could muster in the general public. And I think this had something to do with the scale of the crime, of course, and that it was so clear the police were responsible, but also because the attack on the Ayotzinapa students could be incorporated into an ideological understanding of the world. An attack on these students could be seen as part of a continued oppression of these indigenous communities and their social movements, by the Mexican army and state. Which of course in many ways it was; their lives were not valuable. But in the theory of the fifth bus we also see what really motivates violence in Mexico: ideology and politics sometimes, money always.

At the time of writing Mexico has just inaugurated a new president: Andrés Manuel López Obrador, known as AMLO. The departure of Enrique Peña Nieto and the landslide victory for AMLO marked the end of a political system dominated by the Partido Revolucionario Nacional (PRI, National Revolutionary Party) and its barely indistinguishable opposition the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN, National Action Party). AMLO, running as a candidate for Morena (Movimiento Regeneración Nacional, Movement for National Regeneration), a party he founded in 2014, received fifty-three per cent of the vote with his nearest challenger trailing at twenty-two per cent (The Economist 2018). He campaigned on an anti-corruption and anti-war platform, promising to take troops off of the streets and return them to their barracks (Agren 2018; Nájar 2018). He had also proposed a plan for amnesties for low-level criminals who can be seen as victims in the drugs war themselves: mules, producers, and other precarious people with very little capacity to make choices about their involvement in crime (Espíndola Mata 2018). However, how these amnesties would be implemented remains unclear, and AMLO has since made comments to suggest amnesty for higher-ranking kingpins and politicians accused of corruption (Agren 2018). And in recent weeks, to the disappointment of those who work to fight injustice and corruption in Mexico and internationally, his administration in waiting announced a plan to create a National Guard made up of military and naval police, as well as civilian police, under the direction of the Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional

(Sedena, Ministry of Defence), which critics see as an institutionalisation of the armed forces in charge of public security (Agren 2018; Nájar 2018).

What this presidential term means for the disappeared and their relatives remains uncertain. However, symbolically, one of AMLO's first acts as president was the signing of a presidential decree to create a truth commission for the disappearance of the Ayotzinapa students, which promises to arrive at the truth of the whereabouts of the men and what happened to them (Corona 2018; Díaz and Rodríguez 2018). The truth commission will consist of representatives of the victims, the Mexican human rights commission, the Mexican public ministry, and international organisations, and supposedly its lines of investigation will be decided by the parents of the forty-three (Corona 2018). In this we can see the mechanisms of transitional justice kicking into gear, falling back to a truth commission rather than the justice system.

In February 2018, a prosecutor in the state of Veracruz, eastern Mexico, charged and arrested nineteen current or ex members of the state police on the charge of enforced disappearance (Ángel 2018a). This investigation has opened our eyes to the insides of the machine of disappearance in Mexico, and the collusion of the state and organised crime. After a year-long investigation, the prosecutor has evidence that between April and October 2013, fifteen young people were tortured and disappeared by the state police. Two clandestine police squads worked under the orders of the Secretario de Seguridad Pública de Veracruz (Veracruz Secretary of Public Security), which in Veracruz is controlled by the PRI. One squad patrolled the city of Xalapa picking up anyone who looked suspicious, and the second tortured and executed the suspects within the compound of the Academia de Policía de Veracruz, the Veracruz state police academy (García 2018). This is the first time in Mexico that there is evidence of a paramilitary group existing within the structures of the state, systematically using disappearance following the orders of their superiors (García 2018).

The fifteen documented cases were men and women aged between sixteen and thirty-two. They were never charged or arrested, not taken to a judge or the public ministry. Believed to be working for Los Zetas cartel, they were guilty of a "suspicious attitude" such as texting on a mobile phone, and their only commonality was being young and poor (Ángel 2018a; Ángel 2018b; Ángel 2018c). Asked whether it was

possible that a desperate government could have created a paramilitary group to combat drug trafficking, the prosecutor responded: "You do not have to be naive...it's no accident that all those disappeared allegedly collaborated with Los Zetas. The police did not clear drug traffickers from the area, they did the dirty work of the Jalisco Nueva Generación cartel" (García 2018).

This investigation and prosecution reveals, in one place at one moment at least, the structures of disappearance in Mexico. It unveils who took people, how they were taken, why they were taken, where they were taken, and what happened to them. It is like a first glimpse at what has been obscured for so long, a peak behind the veil of disappearance. We could have imagined something like this, we knew all the separate elements, but in Veracruz disappearance has lost its mystery and we can see the brutal reality of the machine laid bare. What is complicating about this case is that in revealing the mechanisms that blur the division between the state and organised crime, and how state institutions and personnel systematically disappear Mexican citizens, we can clearly see that liberal democracy and the social contract in Mexico is a façade. This is a totalitarian state that brutally assaults its citizens. However, at the same time, within the same structures, we have a prosecutor who is fighting from within the system, using its institutions and mechanisms to serve legal justice to the families of the victims, to reinstate and hold the state accountable to the social contract. Once again we see that the world is always more complicated than our frameworks for understanding it can capture.

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